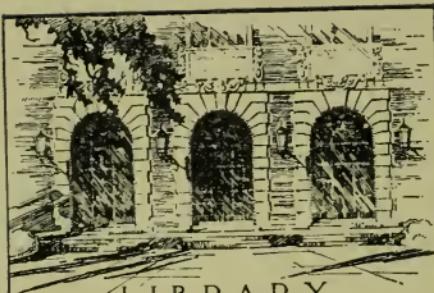


# Too Fast To Last

By

JOHN MILLS



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TOO FAST TO LAST.

VOL. II.



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# TOO FAST TO LAST

BY

JOHN MILLS

AUTHOR OF

“THE OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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## TOO FAST TO LAST.

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### CHAPTER I.

THE reflective powers of Colonel Leferne were engaged, and even riveted upon things past, present, and to come. With his eyes fixed steadfastly before him, and resting on “nothing,” suspended by an invisible thread between the ceiling and the floor of the library, he sat in a chair designed for ease of limb and repose of brain; but not measured—as it would appear—to produce either effect with the slightest approach to a certainty; for he was physically restless, and his mind, from the knitted frown on the brow, appeared ill at ease.

Colonel Leferne sat much longer than he himself was aware, gazing with blinkless eyelids at no part or portion of any corporeal substance, hung by an imperceptible thread, and, the more he gazed, the wider seemed to be the poles of mental satisfaction.

By accident, or, at least, by some unforeseen cause, his eyes at length turned upon the portrait of a departed Leferne, arm'd in steel, over the high and richly-carved oaken mantel-tree, where, with a hand resting on the crossed hilt of his sword, he stood scowling on men and things below. The "Past" and the "Present" regarded each other menacingly, and he of the canvas looked ready to draw a keen edge upon him of the flesh.

" You gave us," soliloquized the colonel, nodding familiarly at the portrait, " that magnificent motto, '*To Live with Will Unfettered,*' and set as noble an illustration of it—if ordinary credence may be placed in your biography—as could well be expected

from its author. "Our house, sir knight,"—the speaker's upper lip curled sarcastically as he spoke—"has sustained its true intent and meaning from generation to generation. You"—he again nodded at the portrait—"are responsible for the first precept, and I, perhaps, for the latest example."

It might be that the eyes of him of the "canvas" became painful to stare at longer by those of him of the "flesh;" for Colonel Leferne's dropped suddenly as he finished the sentence, and he commenced drumming on the table with the ends of his fingers some lively bars of music known only to himself; for not a sound came from them, albeit the movement was active and even spirited.

If grace and elegance can be achieved in the opening of an ordinary door, hung on common hinges, then the combination of these effects was produced as Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas Soppy—introduced himself, and, with a flourish which defied competitive

rivalry, said, "Do you receive, sir?"

The colonel turned his head languidly towards the quarter whence the question emanated, and with half-closed eyes looked at Mr. Soppy without giving utterance to a syllable, and continued his silent harmony.

Mr. Soppy, personating Patience, waited for a reply, and, waiting much longer than he expected, looked embarrassed. The colonel, from the twitching of his lips, appeared in the full enjoyment of Mr. Soppy's evinced perplexity, and anything but disposed to offer immediate relief.

Mr. Soppy, feeling it irksome beyond endurance to remain longer a lonely auditor to dumb concord, coughed, bowed by way of apology for coughing, and recovered his normal position with his toes turned out and his heels turned in.

The Colonel, notwithstanding these outward and visible signs of a perturbed spirit, was in no hurry to put an end to the evident torment of Mr. Soppy's sensitive

nature. In all popular melodies there are variations, as Mr. Soppy saw but did not hear.

There being, however, limits to all things of reasonable elements, Mr. Soppy resolved to be no longer a witness of these silent changes, and he once more repeated the question,

“Do you receive, sir?”

Colonel Leferne raised the two fore-fingers of his right hand in the ordinary manner to command uninterrupted attention, and replied, with a kind of hiss through his teeth,

“The devil, if he waits.”

Mr. Soppy bowed a conditional concurrence.

“It is not exactly the gentleman you mention, sir,” resumed he, “but Mister Jeremiah Early ’as called, and requests a haudience.”

“Let him come in,” curtly rejoined his master.

A reasonable conclusion may be drawn that Jeremiah Early was barely without the door of the library when permission was given for him to be within it; for scarcely had it been conveyed when he appeared with the suddenness of a spring having been touched, his movement being purely mechanical.

“Glad to see you, Early,” was the colonel’s salutation, but whatever might be the degree of his happiness, positive, comparative, or superlative, by the ingress of Jeremiah Early, Esq., attorney-at-law, solicitor in the High Court of Chancery, and gentleman by special Act of Parliament, it produced no hilarity of spirits.

With almost simplicity of manner he pointed to an uneasy chair with a narrow seat and straight back, and the instinct of Jeremiah’s nature told him that he was then and there to occupy that seat, and not make choice of any other, or, if he did, it would be at his own cost and peril.

"Glad to see you, Early," repeated the colonel, throwing his head slowly against the back of his own chair and looking down his nose with half closed eyelids at his visitor. "What have you come for? I don't remember having sent for you?"

"By no means, Colonel," replied Jeremiah, with nervous quickness as he took possession of his cruelly uneasy seat. "By no means, Colonel; you did *not* send for me, sir. I am here, so to speak, a trespasser without notice to quit; but *with* notice to quit, peremptory as the proceeding might be, I, to sum up the case briefly, should take up my hat, it being now on the floor, and step it."

The two fingers were raised at this particular juncture of the earth's evolution, and Jeremiah Early looked familiarized with the signal.

"At our last meeting, sought by me and held at my special request," said the colonel, lazily, "you gave me to understand that,

for the present, and not until my son attained his majority, could you render me any further monetary aid. That time not having arrived, I feel a natural surprise at your being here *uninvited*, and shall deem it a favour if you will dispel all trace of such a ridiculous emotion with as little delay as possible. I cannot conceive," continued the colonel, "a more unbecoming effect to the features than surprise. From some mysterious agency, people are certain to stare wildly under its influence."

The relative position of Colonel Leferne and Jeremiah Early was this—the former was supposed to be under the broad thumb of the latter, and yet, to see them together, the client looked anything but extinguished. Jeremiah Early knew as well as any lawyer in England the power he possessed, and the indisputable sway held now by him over the manorial rights, privileges, vert, heriots, tithes, timber, rents, and everything belonging in the remotest particular to Greatwood

Park ; but in the presence of the colonel he was meekness itself.

Jeremiah Early was bred and born a man of business. He invariably kept a sharp look out for the end—not being particular concerning the means—and the end with him meant “money !” Through a telescope of his own construction he viewed the world far and wide, as inhabited by one race composed of two equal peoples—knaves and fools—both of whom might be turned to advantage at fitting opportunities. Such was the cynical prospect which Jeremiah Early took of the world which, in his estimation, was earthy in the extreme, and not improved with age.

In person Jeremiah looked a matter-of-fact man of business, who might have been born with a pen in his ear. He moved as if time, being capital, was too precious for one moment to be lost, and he shot his words from his lips like peas from a pea-shooter. Abrupt in manner and short of

speech was Jeremiah Early. If any man, however, knew himself it was the present occupier of that most uneasy seat in the library, and among other matters he knew full well that he did not possess the advantage of carrying with him the best letter of introduction in the shape of a good personal appearance ; but, if small to insignificance, he always looked, what he only aspired to be, the respectable professional man of business.

This was the extreme altitude of Jeremiah Early's ambition regarding his personal appearance, and the success attending the design admitted of no dispute, even on the part of those who were anything but disposed to be considered his admirers. Jeremiah was as well informed as Mr. Soppy concerning the effect of a well-starched, well-tied respectable white cravat. He knew, also, that an unpretending suit of black was scarcely open to criticism, and, if he wore cotton stockings, and rather large

bows of black silk ribbon in his highly-polished, square-toed shoes, well, so did his father and grandfather before him, at least so he said, when the subject was mooted.

From a too natural tendency to baldness in his youth, Jeremiah Early resorted to the artificial expediency of wearing a wig, and beginning with the colour commonly called "flaxen," which resembled to a shade his prematurely moulted locks, he continued, "in the sear and yellow leaf of life," to wear the same shade and hue in the form of "a thatch" over and above his cleanly-shaven and ruddy features, by way, perhaps, of a souvenir of the past. There, however, was the flaxen wig, be the cause of its retention what it might. In the language of a dentist, his incisors would be pronounced to be prominent, not dissimilar to a rat's, and, like that well-known cosmopolitan, his eyes were small, black, vicious, and twinkling. If such things existed in the animal creation as rats in human form,

Jeremiah Early might possibly have occupied high rank, caste, and distinction among rats.

"I almost think, Colonel Leferne," said the attorney, after a pause of awkward duration, "that we don't quite understand each other."

"Don't we?" replied the client, in a manner and tone of the most complete inertness. "The faint impression left on whatever wreck of mind I may possess is that there was nothing upon which the slightest misapprehension could possibly arise. I told you, when the opportunity last offered, that I wanted more money immediately, and you told me that more money I could not have. Nothing could be more remote, Early, from a misunderstanding upon the subject. Its chief feature, indeed, was its childish simplicity."

"Not then, Colonel, I said," rejoined the lawyer. "Not then."

"Your answer I recollect perfectly," re-

turned the colonel, beginning a very slight air upon the table, "was conveyed in those two monosyllables. My memory is not so treacherous as I thought it to be."

"It's impossible to raise another shilling by way of mortgage on the property," remarked Jeremiah. "The interest now, in one shape or other, eats up the rent-roll."

"So you were obliging enough to inform me," playfully responded the colonel. "Repetition may be, of course, sometimes necessary, but I don't perceive the irresistible exigency in the present instance."

"The property can be disentailed——"

"You must not seriously expect me, Early," interrupted the colonel, stopping an unfinished bar of the air and looking much aggrieved, "to listen again to those very unpleasant and technical particulars. As I told you then, so I tell you now, when the estates *can* be disentailed, disentail them. Nothing can be plainer than my instructions."

"Can your son's consent be depended upon?" inquired Jeremiah Early, fixing a keen, penetrating look upon his client.

"Certainly not," replied the colonel, sinking his head lower down on the back of his chair, and closing his eyes as if for a short doze. "Our daily life, my dear sir," continued he, "is made up of a succession of unexpected events and incidents. Things happen as a matter of course which were never dreamt of, and things don't happen which, looking back by the tranquil light of history, might be chronicled already as fore-gone conclusions. Take my word, Early, that nothing can be depended upon which is not uncertain."

"But your son——"

"Like other sons who, being human," interrupted the colonel, "will be governed by the stern, unyielding, unflinching hand of something he can't avoid and knows nothing about. He is now sharing, upon what I may call a liberal scale, the remains of his

affectionate father's pecuniary misfortunes; but unless I soon throw in a winning hand at the fine, old universal game of hazard, at which we all play, I fear the remains will—" and the colonel, to illustrate his meaning, blew the tips of his two generally used forefingers, by way of telegraphic signals, in a graceful manner and with a smile expressive of much cheerfulness.

"Long before he is of age," observed the lawyer, "every resource, even to the cutting of a faggot, will be drained."

"In that case," added the colonel, with great coolness of demeanour, "he will feel the force and power of money in the total absence of possessing any—a negative proof of its value."

"His position will certainly be a helpless one," remarked Jeremiah Early, reflectively.

"Derived, I suppose, will be the ill-natured, worldly charge, from the indiscretions and sanguine temperament of his father. The Lefernes," added the colonel,

with a shake of the head, "have ever been indiscreet, and, when unlucky, society has told them so with almost wearisome monotony. There is nothing, Early, more inexcusable," continued he, "than misfortune. The unlucky must not even hope for pardon in this sublunary planet."

"I don't call you unlucky," observed the lawyer.

"Neither do I," added the colonel. "I have nothing to complain of on the score of fortune in the past; it is the future, Early, however short, with which *I* have to deal."

"Such may be said of the lives of most of us," responded the lawyer, with an inward chuckle.

"Your rejoinder is common-place," observed the colonel, drumming noiselessly, "but it possesses the advantage of being true, and, taking into consideration the commanding ascendancy of shams which surround our truly uncertain existence, I

think the merit worthy of conspicuous distinction."

"You——" Jeremiah Early stopped short, and looked confused as he glanced furtively at his client's careless expression of features.

"Pray proceed," added the colonel. "Hesitation too often promotes vulgar curiosity."

"You intend raising more money?" sullenly remarked the attorney.

"I begin to suspect, upon my honour, Early," replied the colonel, bending forward, and leaning on the elbows of his chair, "that you possess the spirit of divination."

"And obtain assistance," continued the lawyer, "through other hands than mine?"

"Your hands being rigidly closed, in a figurative sense, my dear sir," rejoined the colonel, playfully, "rendered the alternative a matter of expediency."

"The position will not be improved by

any such step," returned Jeremiah, and there was a slightly perceptible threat in the jerk of the head which followed the words.  
"I have been your legal adviser and friend —"

"Friend?" repeated Colonel Leferne, lifting his eyebrows, as if much astonished at the term.

"I mean —"

"Don't apologise," said his client, waving a hand gracefully. "Inconsiderate errors of speech are anything but exceptional."

"We will not differ now about words," resumed the lawyer. "What I was about saying was that, so long as it was possible, I carried out your wishes to the letter, and while money could be borrowed on your life interest you never knew the want of it."

"Shall I express my gratitude," responded the colonel, with an ironical smile, "or leave it to be inferred?"

"It is still my wish to assist you," said Jeremiah, without noticing the remark.

"If you could but add interest," returned the colonel, blandly, "I think it might lead to the renewal of our business relations."

"It is not your interest to remove your business from my hands," observed the attorney, with a second jerk of the head.

"Don't trouble yourself," added the colonel, "to negative a proposition which has really never been suggested."

"Can reliance be placed on your obtaining the signature of your son at the hour—ay, the very hour—he is of age? That's the question," said Jeremiah, drawing the breath with a whistling sound through his prominent incisors.

"As a matter of opinion, Early," replied the colonel, again throwing himself back in his chair, and placing the corresponding tips of the fingers of both hands together, "I think it can. I am not accustomed, as you know, to be refused, and, at the proper time, I entertain little apprehension of the defeat of my persuasive powers with

Aubrey, to say nothing of my inability to assist him with a single shilling unless he first comprehends the filial duty of assisting his father by the simple process of signing his name. Speaking from experience," continued he, again drumming, "I should say nothing was easier than signing one's name."

"I'll consider this matter, then," added the lawyer, "and prepare a security which will meet the exigency of the case; but I frankly tell you, Colonel Leferne, that, in so doing, the very chair you sit upon will not be your own."

"How very awkward!" exclaimed the client, recommencing a light air. "Without much thought upon the subject it seems to me approaching the serious, Early, when one's easy chair is mortgaged. In consideration to my sensitive feelings I think you should not insist upon the chair in which I sit daily."

Jeremiah vouchsafed no reply, and soon afterwards took his departure.

## CHAPTER II.

WITHIN a few hours of the arrival of Queen Mary and the Unknown at Greatwood Park, Billy Bottles had, with a little exercise of his sagacity in devising the means to the end, succeeded in having an interview with his old master, Colonel Leferne, and readily obtaining from him the re-appointment of head groom to his limited stud of one brood mare and her foal not far distant of the eve of becoming a yearling. At this affecting conference—for Billy Bottles could not prevent the tears of joy from mingling with his still happier smiles—he spoke in poetical praise of the progeny of the fine old mare, and expressed the opinion that, under his exclusive management, the colt might turn out a “gold mine.”

A scarlet flush spread itself from cheek to brow as the colonel listened to these words.

"A gold mine, eh!" repeated he. "Well, who knows?"

"He's a fine, slashing colt, sir," observed the enthusiastic Bottles, "and has all the grand points of his grand, old mother without a single fault, that I can see, in make or shape. If only as game—if his heart, like hers, is only in the right place,—he'll coin cash faster for you than you'll want it."

"He will, then, indeed be a flyer!" exclaimed the colonel, with a short, mirthless laugh.

"I've never seen, sir, a more promising animal of his age," said Billy Bottles, continuing the theme of his eulogy; "but, where he came from on the father's side, Queen Mary only knows. She must ha' been a sly un, colonel, when out at grass. She must *so*."

"I'll give him at least the chance of distinguishing himself," rejoined his master.

"He shall be entered in engagements in which he will meet the best of company."

"The Unknown 'll not disgrace himself, sir, in the first of the first class," returned the ex-trainer, swaying his head from side to side, "if I'm any judge of what a race-oss should be. A sterling good colt. He is *so*."

"When I make a venture," added the colonel, "it is not, as you well know, for a stake of nutshells."

Reminiscences of hatsfull of money, and pleasant recollections of a liberal share of winnings, too large to be realized by minds of ordinary powers, produced a grin upon the features of Billy Bottles which stretched the angles of his mouth to almost painful tension. He was about making an observation in reply, designed to be "comical," but a well-known signal caught his eye—one that he had regarded with the utmost attention in other days,—and, sooner than it could be told, no one was more grave and nothing more mute than Billy Bottles.

"It is too extravagant to suppose," said the colonel, letting his two fingers drop gently to their former position, "that an accident of this kind should give me once more the welcome sight of my colours first at the finish of a great race, and yet, waking and sleeping, I've dreamt that such would be the case before I die."

"Like comes of like," remarked Billy Bottles, determined to support his argument now that the signal was not against him. "The old mare could pull over them at all distances, and weight never stopped her. Why shouldn't her son show them a clean pair of heels in the same slashing style, colonel?"

"Whether so or not," replied his master, "I have resolved to give him a trial at any cost and all risk. You will, therefore, take him in hand at once, and break and train the colt as if intended to run for my life, as perhaps he may."

Billy Bottles looked out of the corners

of his eyes at the colonel, to learn if the conclusion of the sentence was intended in a serious point of view, or that best known to himself as "comical," but the evidence being doubtful, he threw up a halfpenny in his mind's eye, and decided the issue with a mental toss—head for "reality," and tail for "comical."

"The lad," resumed the colonel, "who exercised judgment beyond his years in the journey here, will remain in attendance upon the colt, as he appears fondly attached to him, and the expression of his countenance is honest, an attraction," continued he, as if speaking to himself, "which greatly pleases me, perhaps from its excessive rarity."

"Johnny Tadpole, sir," replied Billy, folding his arms, as if about to give judgment in anticipation of passing sentence, "is one of those young asses that, having been fed on milk in his early days, will have to be suckled by somebody to the last of his precious life. He will *so*."

"Why?" briefly asked the colonel.

"It never occurred to a gentleman like you, sir, perhaps," said Billy Bottles, taking up the dropped thread of his discourse, "why there are so many out-and-out thieves in the world? The cause is this," continued he, "a cheeky rogue can live, and often will live well, when a bashful, innocent fool would be as sure to starve as a rook on rags. The thieves, colonel, have the pull in this world, and they know it, their misfortunes being only when they are found out. Now, as regards Johnny Tadpole—gutter-bred as he is—he doesn't know what thieving means, only from hearsay, and such is the soft putty of his poor, honest little heart, that it would take a deal o' training to get him to steal a bit of sugar from the cage of a canary. It would *so*."

"If such are his unsophisticated qualities," rejoined his master, "I prefer no experiment being made in the endeavour to improve them."

"It wouldn't do, of course, Colonel," returned Billy, with an air of commiseration, "for the whole of the generation of flats to be turned into sharps. A nice man, that I used to know formerly, called 'em 'Bowels and brains.'"

"Like fish of the sea, river, stream, pond, and pool," added the colonel, "we swim among and live upon each other. It's a great privilege to live, Bottles! Don't you think so?"

"To live well, sir, I do," responded Billy, without the hesitation of a moment. "But when one has to box the compass for a breakfast, a pinch below now and then, raises a doubt upon the subject."

"It is the pinches you refer to, Bottles," rejoined the colonel, with a gentle shake of the head, "which remind us of the remarkably nervous stuff forming our component atoms. The verb to pinch, Bottles, seems to me also to be the active and passive one of omnipotent power. We pinch, and are

pinched, from the cradle to the grave, and the secret of dominant power over men and things is the comparative force of the finger and thumb with that of the resisting power to which the finger and thumb are applied. Do you understand, Bottles?"

"Not exactly, sir," responded Billy; "but I daresay you're right, and as the nice man I spoke of a little while ago used to say, 'it takes two beggars to raise a hargument,' I'll not make one of 'em just now. He was a particularly nice man, though, colonel. He was *so*."

"I could almost wish that he was here, Bottles," returned the colonel, in his languid, lifeless manner. "From the brief quotations you have given of his sayings I think that he must be, what one seldom has the opportunity of beholding, the embodiment of a plain matter of fact. The expression would doubtless," continued he, "be deemed objectionable for a drawing-room, but 'bowels and brains' appear to me rather felicitous."

"He was the sole proprietor of a cat's-meat barrer, sir," observed Billy, as if desirous of elevating the social position of his friend, "and such was his pride that he wouldn't wheel a penn'orth that wasn't thorough-bred meat."

"A remarkable man, no doubt," said the colonel, without raising his voice; "but whose society, perhaps, might be oppressive. There is, however," continued he, "no accounting for self-inflated arrogance, Bottles, and your friend with the barrow may often be met in the highways and byways of the world. I have seen him frequently myself, Bottles, with his thoroughbred meat—but carrion, after all, for cats and dogs—cried by himself."

"Have you, sir, indeed!" exclaimed Billy, placing a too literal meaning upon the colonel's cynical rejoinder. "Then you met a very nice man. He was *so*."

"You have had my orders concerning the Unknown," responded the colonel, wav-

ing a hand which Billy Bottles knew well as another signal of old. "Do your best with him;"—the two fingers were now raised for attention—"for he, perhaps, will have to race for my life."

## CHAPTER III.

SIR HAROLD LEFERNE'S daffodils had once more left no trace of their whereabouts, for they were again underground; but beneath the young crimson tints of the oak, and the tender, silken green of the beech, the blue hyacinth, anemone, and the white stichwort flower began to carpet the earth with brilliant hues. Lychness and rose-tinted bells of dewberries announced that it was blushing May almost within the arms of her expectant bridegroom June. It was the season of the "loves of the flowers," and bees and butterflies were their messengers.

He had not sought for her—there was no pretext for the need of any search being

made—but Aubrey Leferne and Ivy Girling met as if the trysting-place and time had been fixed with great precision and observed with the utmost regularity.

It might have been by accident or design, for nothing was said, either then or afterwards, concerning that unfrequented spot where they met after a separation of six full months, which seemed to one, at least, and perhaps both, as many as six long, weary years. The wish was to be alone with each other, and they were so, with the greenwood tree for their bower, and silence and solitude around them.

“Are you pleased to see me again?” said Aubrey, taking both Ivy’s hands within his own, and holding them as he gazed earnestly in her face.

“If I were not,” she replied, with a coquettish toss of the head, and leaning backwards from him at arms’ length, as if detained against her will, “I should be almost afraid to say so. You look so fierce.”

"I might have both looked and felt so, Ivy," rejoined he, pulling her gently towards him, "had you not been here. What! so long away, and not one kiss?"

"I'm too old to be kissed, Master Aubrey," she returned; "and you ought to know better than to think of such childish conduct. We are not children now."

"I wish, Ivy, that we were," added he, and the distance shortened between his eager lips and the rose-blush on her cheek; "for I was never so happy as when wandering through these woods with you."

"But you seldom wished to kiss me then," expostulated Ivy, yielding slowly by inches, but not yet vanquished.

"Amendment must therefore be made," cried Aubrey, saluting the maiden's cheek with detonating force, "for neglected opportunities."

"I'm rather surprised, sir," remarked Ivy, drawing herself a little above her natural height, and with becoming dignity, "that

you don't know better. I understood that some improvement might be expected from your Eton manners."

" You are not angry with me, Ivy, I know," responded Aubrey, with a joyous laugh, " and I'll not repeat the offence for a little while. I won't, upon my honour."

" For a little while ?" echoed she, slowly scrutinising him from heel to head. " I begin to think, sir, that your Eton manners are anything but a change for the better."

" Well, the truth is, Ivy," said he, placing one of his arms around her slender waist with gentle pressure which, it must be confessed, was not resisted with energy, " we fellows of the sixth form are compelled to kiss every pretty girl we meet. We can't help it."

A flush mantled over Ivy Girling's features at these words, as if her blood had been suddenly heated.

" A fellow," continued he, looking as serious as a rebelliously suppressed spasm

of laughter would permit, “belonging to the sixth form would be expelled if he did not fulfil this duty with painful strictness.”

“Then it appears to me, Master Aubrey,” replied Ivy, making a truly feeble effort to disengage the arm which encircled her waist, “that the sooner the sixth form meets with reform the better.”

“Oh!” exclaimed he, at the pitch of his voice, which produced a wild commotion among the young rooks on the wing above his head, “don’t attempt to be funny, there’s a dear little girl! If there is anything more melancholy to me in this wide, wide world than another, it is the abortive attempt to be droll.”

“It was very stupid of me,” she rejoined, still struggling with waning strength with the arm; “but I spoke without thinking.”

“The wisest, we are told,” returned Aubrey, “too often commit the same venial error.”

There was now a cessation to hostilities,

and the arm was left in quiet possession.

“And so you are really glad to see me again?” resumed he, walking slowly by her side, and rendering far greater support to her weight than appeared necessary from any outward sign of weakness.

“I have not said so,” responded Ivy, letting him understand through the sense of touch that the arm might receive summary notice to quit.

“Having counted the hours since we met,” continued he, without noticing her reply, “by the tick-tock of the pendulum of that old clock of yours.”

“I have done nothing of the sort, Master Aubrey,” rejoined she, with anger which, if feigned, looked natural in the extreme.

The arm, however, was too strong in possession, and from this reason alone it was left in peace.

“Repeating to yourself,” continued Aubrey, without paying the slightest attention to the denial, and as if, indeed, he had not

heard it, “the last good-bye we exchanged until it weighed your tearful eyelids down, and soothed you to slumber and dreams of me from wearisome monotony.”

“I must be permitted to say, sir——”

“And when morning light succeeded the night’s murky darkness,” interrupted he, “you had recourse again to the old clock to lessen the interval of our separation. I know it all, Ivy, without your telling me. We fellows of the sixth form are something of the nature of the fellowship of the prophets.”

It was a merry, ringing laugh which burst from Ivy Girling’s lips at the conclusion of this remark, and, to her credit be it recorded, she stoutly opposed being kissed again at this juncture, protesting that, as “a little while had not elapsed, his promise had not been kept.”

“We fellows of the sixth form,” returned Aubrey, with the gravity of a sage, “are the best judges in the world about natural

philosophy, and all that sort of thing. Now it's the most natural of all philosophy for every fellow on the sixth form to kiss a pretty girl permanently, if he has the chance, but never to allow a possible cause of interruption to his doing so in the shape of short and sharp repetitions."

The force of the argument prevailing, or "a little while" being supposed, or tacitly confessed, to be now of the past, Ivy submitted, without much show of resistance, to "a short and sharp repetition."

"Nothing to me," resumed Aubrey, maintaining the position which he had gained, not without the semblance of a struggle, in so far as the arm was concerned, "can be more agreeable than a walk of this kind with you, Ivy. It is what may be called choice of its kind."

"What would the colonel or my father—"

"Don't mention our stern and arbitrary fathers, Ivy," interrupted he. "Let us for-

get all about our fathers, and, if expedient, deny our origin. No greater interruption to my present happiness could possibly present itself," continued Aubrey, "than the appearance of either of them."

"What should we do," said Ivy, clasping her hands together, and becoming several shades paler as she spoke, "if they were to see us?"

"I should instantly put this question," replied Aubrey. "Change places with me, messieurs, and how would you like it?"

"The answer, I fear," rejoined Ivy, "would be of little service to me."

"Never fear," returned he. "No opportunity will arise for its being given. But now listen, for I have something to say which I know—remember I say know—will please you."

"What is it?" asked Ivy, eagerly.

Aubrey placed his lips closer to the gaily-trimmed cottage bonnet, and uttered in a low tone the most musical words that

ever yet greeted the ears of Ivy Girling.

"You were, as you are," said he, "my first love—the only little sweetheart that I ever had, and you can't think, Ivy, how fond I am of you."

"But I'm a poor girl, sir," expostulated she, with her heart beating faster than ever it had done before, "and you mustn't think of me."

"Oh, yes, I must, though," responded Aubrey, with strongly-developed determination. "It's no fault of yours that you're poor, and I shall be rich enough for both of us some day."

"I feel that no good will come of this, Master Aubrey," returned Ivy, in a voice rather choked than clear. "It will be found out, and then my peace of mind will be gone."

"We fellows on the sixth form," added he, "always put it down, as a rule, never to anticipate your licking. When it comes bear it, we say, as well as you can, it being

one of the soundest principles of natural philosophy. Now, should we be found out," continued Aubrey, pressing her closely to his side, "it will be quite time enough to count the consequences of the discovery when it is made. To do otherwise would be simply to take our licking before it was due. You see, Ivy, what wonderful fellows we are on the sixth form!"

"But I know that I am wrong, sir, in listening to you," sobbed Ivy, "and it's all wrong together."

"Of course it is," said Aubrey. "There is scarcely anything in this world that is not wrong when it's pleasant. We know—I'm speaking of the fellows on the sixth form—that whatever is strictly proper is certain to be tame and insipid. If *improper*, and possessing a margin for the exercise of the human faculties, it is almost as sure to be exciting and palatable. I really begin to have a profound disdain for everything that's right."

"Pray don't say so!" exclaimed Ivy.  
"You'll make me so unhappy if you do."

"Under those circumstances," responded he, "of course I retract the objectionable part of the sentence. At the same time," continued he, "I must beg to impress on your memory, Ivy, not to condemn everything that's wrong, or become ecstatic about everything that's right; my own opinion being, as a fellow on the sixth form, that the wrongs have the best of it."

"We are taught not to think so," returned she, with an appealing look.

"But where's the proof that the teaching is right?" added he. "Show me the most perfect example of a life sacrificed to decorum and virtue, and you'll find that the most perfect example will bleat about the treatment he has received as much, if not more, than the victim to human weakness, who, with the utmost regularity, has done things he ought not to do, and as persistently left undone things which he ought to

have done. The examples, indeed, I think, howl the loudest."

"I can't talk with you, Master Aubrey," observed Ivy, expressing her inability to maintain the argument by a vigorous shake of the head.

"But you can talk to me," replied he, "which is so much more interesting. Come, tell me quickly how pleased you are to know that I'm your declared lover, whatever you may have guessed in those old wanderings of ours."

"I feel truly that I ought not to be," sighed Ivy.

"Never mind that," rejoined Aubrey. "The ought not's are the very spice and pepper of life, and the more we indulge in them the better, I think."

"Must I speak?" plaintively said she, turning her face aside at an angle which looked very attractive in Aubrey's eyes.

"If you don't," returned he, "I'll pinch you, Ivy, I will indeed."

"Such was your threat if I displeased ye, when we were little more than babies," added she.

"To be sure it was," said Aubrey, "and, as it always proved effectual, I shall put it into force again, if you don't confess on the spot the height, depth, and breadth of your love for me. I must have no doubt upon the point."

To this arbitrary mandate Ivy Girling complied, perhaps, too readily. In simple language she avowed the only secret of her heart. It was love for him, and, as each word fell on his willing ear, his attention became diverted from a wandering thought concerning a fragmentary lecture upon dolls. The interruption, however, was but momentary, and, upon Ivy telling him all that could gratify his selfish vanity, he caught her in his arms, and was more emphatic in his promises than sincere.

## CHAPTER IV.

A MONG the attributes of Mr. Thomas Soppy might be classed the great love of the good things of this life. Mr. Soppy was blessed with a palate of a discriminating nature ; his appetite was rather above an average in keenness, and his digestion never gave him the slightest uneasiness. Under these favourable circumstances, Mr. Soppy indulged freely in “the pleasures of the table” supplied by his master, and was only dissatisfied when—let the cause be what it may—his “little dinner” did not come up to the standard of his expectations.

“ Give me,” he would sometimes say, with Christian resignation, to the cook of his early love, “ only a mutton chop and a

mealy tater; but don't let me have to ask whether it's from the loin or neck, or whether the tater's biled, baked, or spiled. A little satisfies me, but that little must be, as nearly as possible, the best of its kind."

With these sentiments concerning his "little dinners" in a general way, it will readily be imagined that there were special occasions which demanded the nicest care on the part of the cook of his early love to realize Mr. Soppy's epicurean anticipations. Dame Soppy knew, from an association of many years standing, that there was nothing so likely to maintain the peace of the household as to earn a compliment for placing a dainty dish before her partner's nose when his hopes were excited—as he was never more taciturn than when quietly diminishing a dainty dish—and nothing more likely to lead to a domestic quarrel of doubtful length and strength, than for disappointment to be conveyed to his breast through failing to gratify his palate.

As before has been stated, Mr. Thomas Soppy was averse to manual work; but he had no objection to assist in the amenities of employment, and shelling, peas coming under this definition, he might have been seen on one of the days of the calendar exercising his fingers and thumbs in the performance of this mild and gentle office. Mr. Soppy sat at his ease in a chair, with an apron tied above the middle button of his waistcoat by way of protection to its spotless character, and watched with undisguised interest the active culinary operations of the cook of his early love as she continued to baste with discreet attention a leg of lamb of great beauty—looking at it in the light of lamb and not mutton. Mr. Thomas Soppy was fond of lamb and peas at their introduction in the early part of the spring season, and, taking time by the forelock, he had carried out certain arrangements of his own particular sketching which insured the minute accomplishment of his intentions to have a

“little dinner” which demanded the natural accessory of mint sauce.

“There, my little semi-circle,” said Mr. Soppy, in the most playful of humours, “there’s the last pea, and by the time they’re biled I think that picter of a leg, if I may judge from its complexion, will be done to an exact turn. One turn more or less than it ought to have, my sweet numerator, and I should have to be carried out in a fainting condition.”

“Leave it to me, Thomas,” replied Dame Soppy, entertaining a firm belief that good dinners and good tempers bear close affinity, “and you shall have no cause to grumble.”

“That I feel with the utmost confidence,” rejoined Mr. Soppy, and placing a hand rather below the belt—supposing he had worn one as champion of the heavy weights—he added, “and I feel it here.”

Indolent as Mr. Soppy might appear while shelling peas and looking on, he now bestirred himself with a briskness of manner

almost exceeding ordinary powers of belief.

“Our friend Bottles,” said he, unfolding a snow-white cloth, and throwing it gracefully over the surface of the adjacent table, “who has seen too much of low society to suit me, will take his farewell spread with us to-day, and I particularly wish that his coarse and almost disgusting habits may receive a whole lesson in refinement before leaving.”

“I look upon him,” was Dame Soppy’s bland reply, “as rather a nice man.”

“Then don’t do it again,” rejoined he, turning an acute angle in his temper as he flung a small pyramid of knives and forks in the centre of the table with more force, if not violence, than seemed necessary.

“A nice man, my segment of an angle, was never reflected in a looking-glass when Bottles shaved before it. As my favourite mathematician euclid wrote, ‘What can’t be isn’t.’ ”

The barometer of Mr. Thomas Soppy’s

good humour being evidently in a falling condition, the cook of his early love dropped the discussion concerning the niceness of Bottles as a matter of expediency, and paid silent attention to the approaching finish in dressing the lamb and peas.

In the meantime Mr. Soppy proceeded to arrange the knives and forks, and placed a pair of each at equal distances, clearly designed in anticipation for the separate use and benefit of four performers. Going on with the light task of laying the table—classed under the amenities of employment—Mr. Soppy put the mustard-pot in the correct position which a mustard-pot should hold in combining use with elegance, and, paying the same discriminating attention to the pepper and salt, the master hand of an artist began to be seen in the skill already displayed. The additional polish, perhaps, would seem trifling to the eye of careless indifference; but not so to that of the critical Mr. Soppy. Wherever a crease was

visible in the snow-white cloth he smoothed it tenderly, and ironed it out with the palms of his hands. Attention was paid to the most minute detail, and, upon the completion of the work, he stood and surveyed it complacently with folded arms, and a smile of satisfaction illuminating his countenance.

The leg of lamb was now taken from the spit, and the peas—following in order—from the pot just as the former had completed that accurate rotation which Mr. Soppy referred to as of vital importance. The cook of his early love “dished up,” and the feast was ready.

Barely, however, could it have been so stated in strict accordance with the fact when a shuffling of feet was heard, and immediately afterwards Billy Bottles entered the kitchen, attended by Johnny Tadpole in the capacity of “henchman.”

“Here we are!” cheerfully exclaimed Billy, bringing his hands together with a loud crack, “just, I see, in the nick of time

—winning on the post by a short head. How are ye, Thomas, and how are you, m'm?" added he, moving an amendment in his manners by making an inquiry concerning the health of his host and hostess.

Receiving the prompt assurance that both were in a highly satisfactory state, and polite exchanges having been made with the "henchman," who bowed and blushed with united awkwardness and modesty, the entertainers and the entertained sat down to regale themselves on "lamb"—as Mr. Soppy begged his guests to clearly comprehend—"not mutton."

"If my memory is not treacherous," observed the host, drawing the ball of a thumb lightly down the edge of the carving-knife as a preliminary flourish to the exhibition of his skill, "you don't object to fat, Bottles."

Billy had, at this early part of the proceedings, selected, with his eyes twinkling with emotion, a tit-bit of brown which,

coveting so as to make his mouth water, he made no scruple to point out in a direct line with his fork as a morsel he should like to be put in possession of.

"Just there, Thomas," said he, "and I'll soon show ye how far you may depend on your memory. *I will so.*"

Mr. Soppy gave a severe look at Bottles, and began to think that the association of several months with him, and the purifying atmosphere of Greatwood Park, had been entirely thrown away upon an unworthy object.

Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas Soppy—severed the piece of brown in gloomy silence, and looked as if a personal injury had been inflicted; but, as soon as Bottles possessed the opportunity of commencing diligently to work upon the supply set before him, he appeared to forget the indignity, and all began once more to go well and smoothly with the feast. Johnny Tadpole made no ridiculous secret of having

a natural affection for both fat and lean, and illustrated it in a manner not open to scepticism. Dame Soppy remarked, parenthetically, that "she liked every part of a jint but bone," and Mr. Soppy said nothing, but did a great deal in a quiet, methodical sort of way which proved effective in the end.

"Help yourself to peas, young Tadpole," suggested he, with the air of a patron of high degree.

Johnny Tadpole complied with supreme readiness; but no sooner were the peas in his plate than they were shovelled on the point of his knife, and, with great dexterity, into his mouth.

Mr. Soppy both felt and looked horrified.

"Do you know," said he, "what forks are for?"

Johnny, being too much occupied with the attention he was assiduously paying to himself, did not perceive the perturbation of mind in his host, and innocently replied

that, "having played a game of knife and fork now for a good many years, he thought he did."

"Admitting your premises," rejoined Mr. Soppy, "then why the devil do you fork with your knife?"

Johnny Tadpole now became aware that Mr. Soppy was serious. There was no mistaking him when he was roused to a certain pitch, and so terrifying were the effects upon Johnny Tadpole that he dropped the handles of the instruments under discussion perpendicularly upon the table, and sat staring between them with his mouth open, and not so clear as might be desired by a disinterested spectator of lamb and peas.

"If you don't shut your mouth," thundered Mr. Soppy, "I shall be sick."

"Do as you're told, Johnny," said Billy Bottles, admonishingly. "Close your trap, pull your ears a little back, and just polish the end of your nose with anything handy, and our friend Thomas Soppy's stomach

here will soon be restored. It will *so*."

"It always was a bit weakly," chimed in Dame Soppy.

"Wos it, mum?" rejoined Bottles. "I look upon stomachs, mum," continued he, "only in one way. If strong, I say, keep 'em strong. If weak, splice 'em."

"What, splice your——"

"Why not, mum?" interrupted he. "Nothing's easier. A good dinner every day in the week, and a better one on Sunday, is as good a splice as I know of. It is *so*, eh, Thomas?"

Mr. Soppy, having partially recovered from the excitement produced by Johnny Tadpole's unconscious breaches of decorum, answered mildly in the affirmative, but kept his eyes fixed with a suspicious stare on the delinquent, which made him shrink visibly in his shoes. Entertaining, however, the assurance that there would be no repetition of the trial to his delicacy of feeling, Mr. Soppy modified the rigidity of his look, and

soon removed the cause altogether of the contraction in Johnny's system. Expansion following as a natural effect, fair advantage was taken of the opportunity to make good the deficiency in the time lost, and Johnny Tadpole finished a dinner quite equal to his limited capacity.

At the conclusion of the repast Mr. Soppy was seen to dive beneath the table in a sudden and mysterious manner, and, after being lost to sight for as short an interval as can well be described, appeared again panting a little for want of breath, and a purple tinge spread over his countenance from the united influence of exertion and "lamb and peas." As soon as he had risen it was evident that he had not taken his temporary departure for nothing, for in one hand he bore a bottle of large dimensions, commonly known to past generations of Bacchanals as a "magnum of port." Placing it on the board with much pride and some ceremony, Mr. Soppy remarked

that “to insure condition there was nothing like keeping a bottle of port between the calves of your legs during dinner. It seemed to brighten it, and give it a mellow flavour.”

“I’ll not take your word for it, though,” responded Billy Bottles. “Let me decide for myself, Thomas, whether it has the real calf-like taste or not. I’m an out-an’-out judge. I am *so*.”

Before, however, the cork was drawn from what looked a truly ancient specimen of the art of bottle-making, Dame Soppy cleared away the remains, odds and ends, and total vestiges of the feast, and when everything around had been made, as she expressed it, “tidy,” the magnum’s contents of forty years old—as Mr. Soppy affirmed with great earnestness—were disgorged, and he both filled and passed the glasses round with a ready and liberal hand, which proved at least his desire to carry out his master’s special injunctions to share a bottle of the best wine in his cellar with Billy and his

henchman, Johnny Tadpole, on the eve of taking their departure from Greatwood Park for the historical town of Newmarket.

## CHAPTER V.

A GREAT arrival was expected at the dairy in Bromley Marsh. It had been announced through successive despatches from Johnny Tadpole—the o's still bearing a strong resemblance to small bird's eggs—that the Unknown would be on his way to Newmarket in a day or two, for the express purpose of receiving some highly-finishing touches to his education, and “to be tried.” Samuel Wideo had been kept well “posted” by his correspondent in all matters of interest concerning the colt, and so graphic was the description given of the breaking and training of Queen Mary’s son that, as the erst wearer of the purple and orange declared, “he could see him doing his work

in Greatwood Park as plainly as if he had been present."

With a modest reticence, highly to be commended, Johnny wrote little about himself; but it would appear that he had been specially retained to ride the Unknown at exercise, under the immediate superintendence of Billy Bottles, and that "his head, hands, and heels" had met with great commendation from the eminent authority referred to. He had also been told by Colonel Leferne himself, after a rattling gallop of two miles, that he "not only rode, but rode well," and such were the amicable terms he was on with the colt that he could do just as he pleased with him, his temper being more like an angel's than that of a "race-oss." It would seem, too, through the same unquestionable channel of information, that a most favourable opinion was entertained of the Unknown's symmetrical points, and grand, sweeping stride, and that both the owner and trainer were sanguine of his

turning out "a flyer of the first-class."

To such an extent did this feeling prevail that, upon the Unknown becoming a yearling, he was entered as a competitor for some of the highest prizes of the Turf, and the time now approached, it would seem, when his first essay must be made to support this bright, glowing promise, or to darken it for ever with disappointment.

Such may be described as a summary of the principal events which had been communicated to Samuel Wideo, from time to time, concerning the colt during his assistant's absence from the milk business; but that which excited the liveliest enthusiasm on the subject was the announcement that the Unknown would confer the honour upon the inhabitants of Bromley Marsh and its immediate vicinity by passing one night at the dairy, on his road to Newmarket "to be tried."

Samuel Wideo began to hope that the light of other days had not so irremediably

faded, but that their colour might be renewed, and with a sanguine impulse he at once applied to his mind's eye a kaleidoscope of dazzling and deceptive brilliancy. Once more the purple and orange came before his enraptured gaze in all their fresh and pristine beauty, and the glowing past, with its infinite memories, became reflected in the present.

Samuel Wideo merited, perhaps, the title of "a dreamer;" but then it should be recollectcd that, after Johnny Tadpole's departure from the dairy, he had been left alone in the solitude of Bromley Marsh, and, although the milk business occupied much of his time, there was a wide space left for building castles in the air, an architectural employment well adapted to his tastes and habits. It must not, however, be conjectured that one solid duty was neglected for castle building. The daily strain upon those well-known historical ends to enforce their meeting was too great for Samuel

Wideo to abandon plain, undeniable facts for poetry. The two cows demanded his attention, in more ways than one, as well as the pump, and there was a crusty customer or two who required to be mollified when the milk looked too blue to be purely natural. For, be it heralded through the highways and byways of the world, that Samuel Wideo, the dairyman of Bromley Marsh, as a member of the human family, had his intervening doses of bitters, acting, perhaps, like tonics, wholesome but unpalatable.

For the long, long months that Johnny Tadpole had been in the direction of the setting sun, not a word had been written concerning the probable length of his absence. Colonel Leferne had given a peremptory order for "the assistant" to remain where he was in the land of the west, and as usual, no thought of opposition was raised to his imperious mandate.

The earth had rotated on her axis, in the

usual whirligig fashion, at the rate of five thousand miles a minute—more or less—since Johnny Tadpole's departure, but the dairy in Bromley Marsh remained as before without any marked or discernible change. The world might go round, but the dairy stood still, as far as any outward or inward appearances went, and within a confined circle of its whereabouts things looked stationary. Older he must have become, if not wiser, but Samuel Wideo and time had shaken hands, and were evidently on friendly terms.

In the cribbed and confined apartment of the dairy which served for “parlour and kitchen and all,” Samuel Wideo sat alone after the toil and troubles of the day, ruminating on the news contained in the letter last received from Johnny Tadpole. In a hypercritical sense little improvement was to be traced in the formation of the characters. The upstrokes were still anything but fine, and the o's were prodigious; but the

intelligence it contained was nothing short of startling, and fraught with the deepest interest. The Unknown, now rising two years old, was announced in unequivocal terms, admitting of no doubt, to be on his way “to be tried” at Newmarket, and by Colonel Leferne’s orders—“he was born with an order in his mouth, I believe,” sighed the ruminator,—he was to pass one night beneath the unpretending roof which sheltered him at his birth.

Here was honour and distinction conferred on Bromley Marsh and the surrounding district without so much as a bow or a scrape or a word of solicitation. No greater compliment either could have been bestowed upon Samuel Wideo, as he thought, and he at once set to work to render a more than fair equivalent for the gratuity.

With the cheery catch of a song sung in the blithesome days of his youth the dairyman set to work and put his untenanted

stable in the nicest trim for the reception of his illustrious visitor. It was washed, scrubbed, rubbed, and renovated in a way befitting the occasion which demanded it. Several patriarchs of spiders, in the possession of wide-spread, ancient, and dusty webs, received hasty and violent notice to quit. A bed of the best wheat straw that money could command “down on the nail,” as Samuel Wideo expressed a business transaction for cash, was carefully spread on the floor for the bay colt—sire unknown—to tread his dainty feet upon, and frills of the same material ornamented the stallposts with picturesque effect, while a plait interwoven with great skill was arranged in the rear of where his heels would be, and as a whole combined the useful with the beautiful. Nothing was left undone, and everything was done that could be, to honour and welcome the Unknown to the birthplace and scene of his foalhood.

The work being completed, Samuel

Wideo, in a feverish state of expectancy, now sat in his parlour occupying both chairs, for his legs and feet were on one while his body occupied the other. Sitting as he was, “a-thinking” of things in general and particular, both large and small, it can scarcely be surprising that his mind should be disturbed concerning the seat for Johnny Tadpole. Two chairs for three persons must be inconvenient, if not impossible, and yet there were but two, and the apartment was not designed to hold more. There was the mantelshelf, it is true, in its old and usual position, but to invite him to sit on that high and narrow ledge was not worthy of a second thought. If practicable the position could not be rendered one of either grace or ease, all must depend upon doubtful want of room. A small corner of the table might be spared, perhaps, but with questionable convenience ; for, when Samuel Wideo played the part of host, it was on the most liberal scale, and the profusion of

things in season, with a total omission of everything out, was such that this rickety article of furniture generally reeled with the weight, and always threatened to be clear of oppression by a summary pitch. As many difficulties, however, which appear insurmountable have vanished through the medium of an electric thought, so was the impediment to the dairyman's tranquillity of mind removed in the time it occupies to complete a wink.

The bottom of a milk-pail flashed through his brain, and there was an end to the confusion of ideas concerning Johnny Tadpole's seat at the banquet already prepared for his reception.

The evening had come for the Unknown and his attendants to arrive, and, as the hour approached for them to be there in accordance with the time named in the last despatch, Samuel Wideo might have been observed to become restless and even fidgety. He crossed his legs and uncrossed

them, folded his arms and unfolded them, rubbed his hair in a manner which, had it been done on a cat's back, might, in a tempestuous state of the atmosphere, have produced sparks of electricity, the way being against the grain and the friction vigorous. He went to the window and peeped through the glass ; he went to the door and looked out ; he jingled some keys and halfpence together in one of the deep pockets of his trowsers, and, as the shades of the coming night began to fall like a veil upon Bromley Marsh, Samuel Wideo felt the ice-chill of disappointment at his heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

COLONEL LEFERNE and his son Aubrey were alone in the large wilderness of a dining-room of the Hall, after going through the stately form of dinner with as much frigid ceremony as Mr. Thomas Soppy could impart by an elaborate display of his perfect knowledge of the rules of etiquette.

Mr. Soppy having satisfied himself that nothing more remained to be accomplished in his particular art, for the time being, had retired from the scene of his triumph, and the father and son were alone.

The long, wide, gloomy room was imperfectly lighted by a large, antique bronze lamp swinging from a black, oak beam

just above their heads, which cast pale and sickly rays beneath and around, and made the dark, misty corners look darker still. The portraits of a few members of past if unforgotten generations looked scowlingly from their worm-eaten frames on the panelled walls, and supplemented the unique collection which might be found in various parts of the ancient house of the old knightly family.

Before the windows were drawn in ample folds large, heavy curtains of faded damask, on which were woven quaint figures, flowers, and forms in tapestry, the handiwork of skilful fingers long since emblems of fixity and rest. On the hearth—for there were no modern stoves in the Hall of Greatwood Park—huge logs of wood burned, smouldered, and crumbled to white ashes between the andirons, adding to the lurid light given by the lamp, but in no way increasing the cheerfulness of the scene.

Colonel Leferne never looked more tran-

quil in body and mind, as with an intricately cut glass claret jug partly filled, standing within easy reach on the table, he sat in an attitude of great repose, with his head thrown back on his chair, drumming what, perhaps, might have been a spirit-stirring tune, but it was too subdued for a single note to be audible. Twisting the corners of his moustache with the unemployed hand, he continued the air with a pleasant smile upon his features, and looked on the very best terms with himself, the world, and things past, present, and to come.

His companion, however, exhibited as positive an opposite to this picture of self-complacency as can well be conceived. Pale, thin, and dejected, Aubrey remained motionless, with a fixed stare bent upon some chosen spot on the polished surface of the table before him—but the vacancy of the look revealed that he saw nothing. Young as he was, deep lines mapped his brow and cheeks, and the frown shadowing

the fire which flashed the dark, hazel eyes of his race, showed a mind disturbed and anything but at rest.

"You don't appreciate this wine, Aubrey?" said the colonel, raising his glass and looking at it with great deliberation, "and yet," continued he, drumming so as to be slightly heard, "it is of a remarkable vintage. You must be getting fastidious."

"I care nothing for wine, sir," replied Aubrey, in a tone and manner which closely approached the sullen.

"Don't, my dear boy, annoy me with the repetition of such a remark," rejoined the colonel, persuasively. "No gentleman must confess indifference concerning the quality of the wine he drinks, whatever may be the lamentable condition of his palate. Do me the favour to fill your glass."

Mechanically Aubrey complied with the request, but neither said nor did anything by way of acknowledgment.

The music now increased on the table, so

that every note might be heard with great distinctness, and, if it possessed no other attraction, it was at least merry in the extreme. After a lengthened pause, only enlivened by the drumming, Aubrey turned with a hasty movement towards his father, and with an earnest, serious look said, in a voice tremulous with emotion,

“ I think, sir, the time has come when there should be few, if any, secrets between us.”

“ No well-considered words,” replied the colonel, bending his head slightly forward as he spoke, “ could better express my opinion upon the subject. Unreserved confidence, however, between father and son,” continued he, “ seems too sublime a theory for practical purposes.”

“ I have long wished,” resumed Aubrey, without noticing the remark, “ to speak to you concerning myself.”

“ Few can speak of themselves without committing irreparable blunders,” rejoined

the Colonel, gently folding his arms across his breast. “It appears to me nothing but common fairness, my dear boy, to give you this friendly warning.”

“I have no desire to keep my terms at Oxford,” sharply returned Aubrey, which, perhaps from the total want of introduction in the subject, brought the colonel’s arms to their former position.

If startled, however, he quickly recovered his serenity.

“It will clearly save much unnecessary trouble, my dear boy,” added he, in words which sounded as if oiled expressly for the occasion, “if you confine yourself to affirmatives, and leave the negatives totally out of the question.”

“I wish to go abroad,” said Aubrey, “and not to Oxford.”

“That’s better,” responded the colonel, with two or three gentle taps, which seemed to signify suppressed applause. “Let me hear, with all imaginable interest, what your

wishes are, and spare yourself the fatigue of giving the faintest description of what they are not. And so," continued he, in a manner of the most perfect cheerfulness, "the enterprising, adventurous spirit of the old Crusading Lefernes prevails as strong as ever in the latest descendant! Like some of the knight-errants of our name, who conducted themselves with anything but strict propriety when distressed ladies were in the case, if certain and numerous traditions of our family are to be believed, you wish to roam the world with will unfettered?"

"I merely wish to travel——"

"Alone?" interrupted the colonel, bending forward in his chair as if to catch the answer more readily.

The eyes of the father and son met, and neither seemed disposed to remove the fixed, blinkless gaze with which each regarded the other.

"I beg to remind you, my dear boy," observed the colonel, still maintaining the

steadfast look, but with a smile which almost merited the description of being winning, "that in the opening of this very pleasant subject you expressed the thought that the time had arrived for there being few, if any, secrets between us. Now, all I ask at the present moment is whether you propose travelling alone?"

"I had not thought of a companion," replied Aubrey, while a red flush spread over his features, and mounted from cheek to brow.

"In that case," rejoined the colonel, gently falling back in his chair, and re-occupying his former position of mental and physical tranquillity, "the question is solved. We need not pursue it further."

"May I ask, sir, why it was put?" said Aubrey, with a vexed, angry expression which was not lost upon the colonel.

"From a natural and, I trust, affectionate interest in your welfare, my dear boy," responded he. "Like the moon, we borrow

so much reflected light that nothing can be more important than the associations by which we are surrounded. The average of human intellect," continued the colonel, beginning to drum a fresh and favourite air of a most lively kind, "is distinguished for parasitical dependence and opaque stupidity."

" You do not oppose—"

" Not for a moment," intervened the colonel. " I never charge the impossible in front, my dear boy. You will have your own way, as I have had mine, and nothing can be more consistent than that history should repeat itself. Written in vain for our instruction," continued he, " the records of the past are useful only as a proof that human follies move in circles. Try the claret, Aubrey. The vintage is unexceptionable."

Aubrey lifted the glass to his lips, and perhaps tasted the wine, but it might have been vinegar for aught he could tell.

There was now an interval of silence

which might appropriately be called a pause of extreme awkwardness, felt by one, at least, if not by both. The colonel, it is true, maintained his unruffled demeanour, and, with head thrown back, looked down his nose with half-closed eyes at his son, and from the looped-up angle of the lip, half smile, half sneer, seemed in the humour of a capricious cat, as ready to scratch as purr.

“Have you anything more to communicate,” at length said he, “concerning this roving proclivity?”

“Not now, sir,” responded Aubrey. “I have nothing more to say at present.”

“Then you’ll excuse, I am sure, in return,” rejoined the colonel, “my demand upon your attention for a few moments.”

Aubrey Leferne glanced uneasily at his father, but said nothing.

“I have,” began the colonel, “an instinctive dread of subjecting myself to the accusation of dealing in platitudes, and yet

I fear, my dear boy, that you will, in what I am going to say, put me down in the chronicle of your memory as one of the most prosy of mortals."

A slight, almost imperceptible motion on the part of his hearer, and, as if some interruption was expected, the two fingers became raised.

"Your patience shall not be strained beyond the endurance of a few moments," said the colonel, and, letting the signal for silence fall gradually as he sipped the claret in finite, delicate quantities, he settled himself in a lounging position in his chair, and looked down his nose with half-closed, sleepy eyes at his son as he began his address.

"Adopting your own idiom, my dear boy, I quite coincide in the well-timed suggestion that there should not be held in reserve any longer quite so much of the unknown between us as hitherto has existed, more, perhaps, from the force of attending circumstances than deliberate intention on the part

of either. We have seen, comparatively speaking, little of each other, and, to be frank with you, my dear boy, I have not had the slightest inclination for our interviews to be more extended or frequent."

Aubrey Leferne started as if the words had stung him to the quick.

The signal for silence was again raised.

"As I have before remarked," quietly resumed the colonel, "your nature is sensitive to a fault; but be consoled by my assurance that, however ready I may be to resent an affront, I never give one. My words referred to my own transgressions, Aubrey, and never am I so powerfully reminded of them as in your individual presence, which will account, logically, at least, for my shunning rather than seeking it. Our social iniquities," continued he, just moistening his lips with the claret, "being before us in an intensified state are anything but pleasant companions. Your glass meets with little attention. I begin to fear that

you question my judgment concerning the vintage."

Aubrey, with an impatient movement, emptied his glass, and, replacing it on the table with unintentional force, snapped it from its stem.

"Pray make no apology for so trivial an outrage," said the colonel, drawing back the angles of his mouth, as he looked down his nose at his son, with partly-shut eyelids. "I have no objection whatever to the enlivening sensation of the cracking of brittle elements. But referring," continued he, "to what I was about to impart. You necessarily are familiar, my dear boy, through the ordinary channels of information—your Aunt Margaret, and that transparent old sham, Soppy, being the principal mediums—with the family misfortunes of the past, and which have, at length, culminated in the person and position of the present inheritor, Aubrey, of the Leferne estates, signifying, of course, myself. It

would, therefore, be mere waste of time to drone into your ears the repetition of the particulars of a series of causes which have led not only to the demand upon my resources being far in excess of the supplies, but—if Early be correct in his view of the emergency of the case—without the vestige of any resources whatever. He had, in fact," said the colonel, bringing himself slightly forward on his elbows, "the audacity to declare, when I attached my autograph to the last ugly-looking batch of documents which he technically called 'securities,' that the very chair which I have now the privilege of occupying was not my own. Only think, my dear boy, of one's chair belonging to somebody else!"

The colonel here sipped his claret, and then continued.

"Money, as you will learn some day, if not already acquainted with the axiom, is power, and without it our helplessness may

be compared with birds devoid of feathers to their wings. Now, it affords me some consolation to be able to state that the last mortgage on what, I believe, Early called my goods and chattels, which includes even the vulgar pots and pans in the kitchen, has put me into possession of a limited and available balance highly pleasant to contemplate while it lasts, the drawback being that reflection tells me it won't last long unless, indeed, Fortune smiles once more upon her favourite. Yes, Aubrey," and his colourless, pallid features reddened as he spoke, "I will once more try the hazard of a cast with the wreck of what I have. Fortune favours those most who trust her most, and in me she shall find the culminating point of full reliance."

"In what way, sir?" inquired his son, almost startled with the vehemence with which the last few words were spoken.

"Listen," continued the colonel. "We judge between right and wrong by the

result, and, if success attends the venture of placing the last remnant of my fortune upon the strain of a flexor tendon, the world will felicitate me for my enterprise and courage. Should the fibrous muscle stretch, and thereby lose what otherwise I should have won, the world will shake its sage head reprovingly, and award me the honours of a graduate for a lunatic asylum. A letter received this morning informs me that the colt, so strangely mine, and which I sent some time since to Newmarket to be trained, has proved himself to be the best and most highly-tried two-year-old in the Heather House stable. Knowing that I may depend upon the truth of the statement, and the unquestionable correctness of the trial, I have determined that, in his first race, he shall start for a stake for which no horse hitherto has ever been known to run"—an almost unnatural light darted from his eyes as he spoke—"his owner's life."

The conclusion of the sentence was de-

livered in a manner to admit of no doubt concerning its meaning.

An exclamation of horror was about to burst from Aubrey's lips after a deeply-drawn, convulsive breath, but two uplifted fingers checked it.

"Fear nothing," resumed the colonel. "With the Romans suicide was popular, but in these degenerate days it is excused only in the mad, and I am not that. And yet for your sake, Aubrey, as well as my own, the horse, so strangely mine, shall run for my life!"

"Pray explain your meaning, sir," added his son; "for, doubtful as I must be, you both look and speak as if you were in earnest."

"I was never more so," rejoined the colonel, "and to some extent I will indulge your wish, if not to the fullest degree. If I were to die, Aubrey, before you came of age—to use the ridiculous conventional language applied to that period of life when a

man is left unprotected by the law and at the very moment when he most requires it —you would become the possessor of an unfettered income of between ten and twelve thousand a year, and, with the exception of the general clearance of the timber, you would have little cause to remember your father as having been hostile to your pecuniary interests. I may, also, mention that, in so far as planting acorns in unlimited numbers with the point of my cane may be viewed as an amiable intention on my part to do my best towards compensating you for pocketing the timber, it cannot be said hereafter that I treated the restoration which time will produce with either callous neglect or selfish indifference. This would be the state and condition of your affairs, my dear boy, in the event of your becoming an orphan between now and the day and hour when the law removes its shield from your infancy and seems to me to invite the harpies of the earth to swoop

down like buzzards to a feast. The wine stops with you, Aubrey. Help yourself and pass it."

The colonel having replenished his glass held it up before him, and appeared to be bestowing another look of admiration upon the wine of a remarkable vintage. A keen observer, however, would have seen that his eyes were momentarily fixed with a searching glance upon the countenance of his son.

"But every medal has its reverse," continued the colonel, "and what I am going to tell you, Aubrey, is the exact position you will occupy upon arriving at your majority, if I keep you out of your life interest by being alive myself. There will not be a single sixpence in the shape of income left for investing even in a gingerbread doll. All, my boy, will have——"

And he illustrated the conclusion of the sentence by gracefully blowing the tips of his fingers.

"What then, sir, is to be done?" asked Aubrey.

"A most sensible question," responded the colonel, "and the reply shall be as brief and condensed as possible? In the event of my being so inconsiderate as to stop the way at the time alluded to, the property I believe, as much for your convenience as my own, would have to be disentailed—as Early terms it—and resettled, the only objection to the adoption of this course being that, in the process of resetting, the present circumference and margin of the estates must unavoidably be contracted. I hope that I make myself clearly understood?"

"It is scarcely anything more than I anticipated," remarked Aubrey, dreamily.

"In that case," said the colonel, "there is really nothing more to add, excepting perhaps the explanation of the mystery concerning the stake for which my horse is to run—my life."

"It is that, sir," returned his son, "which

I beg in mercy to myself—for I fear, notwithstanding the lightness of your speech, the earnestness of some fixed and terrible purpose—may be rendered clear without the suspense of another moment.”

“The interest you portray, Aubrey, in so simple a matter, if measured by its value,” added the colonel, smiling, “flatters me. Being, however, wearied with the subject, you must pardon the postponement of the sequel to the occasion of our having another bottle of this exquisite claret together. Your hand. Good night.”

Before Aubrey Leferne had recovered from his astonishment at the sudden termination of the subject under discussion, the colonel had quitted the room, and he was alone with the old portraits scowling upon him from above.

## CHAPTER VII.

A CHANGE had come o'er the spirit of Mr. Thomas Soppy which can scarcely be conceived by the highest powers of the imagination. Instead of possessing the master mind to control, dictate, and even bully the yielding, amiable, and meek, Mr. Soppy's personal appearance and general demeanour gave the effect of his having been lately ironed out as flat as a pancake. Like the flabby cravat round his throat, with the bow under his left ear, every atom of starch had vanished from his system, and as he sat gently rocking himself to and fro on a chair in the still-room one evening, while Dame Soppy's nimble fingers were engaged in deftly knitting a pair of winter

hose for her liege lord's square-toed feet, he looked as if stockings were farthest from his thoughts, however much they might occupy those of his wife.

Dame Soppy had said not a word for some minutes by the clock, being addicted to the maintenance of unbroken silence on her part in the presence of her husband as a rule, made conspicuous only by exceptions.

Mr. Soppy sighed from the lowest depths of somewhere supposed to be the source from whence sighs rise, and, after making one or two ineffectual efforts to speak, was at length successful in finding utterance to his woes.

"I shall never be myself again, Martha," said he, in tremulous accents. "In your lawful husband you'll diskiver a stranger to your bed and board. His identity is clean gone, and he may be looked upon in the light of another!"

At this point he choked with visible

emotion, but, having swallowed it in a masterly manner, proceeded.

“When a mischeevious but interesting little child,” continued he, “I certainly *did* believe in ghosts, hobgoblins, and the hori-  
gin of hall hevil”—Mr. Soppy glanced ner-  
vously over the back of his chair—“with  
cloven hoofs and a forked tail. Possessing  
that confidence which is ever the twin bro-  
ther of hinnocence, I did not think all men  
were liars, and so far, perhaps, deserved a  
nose-ender for going dead against the Scrip-  
ters. At any rate, I had as much faith in  
hobgoblin stories, witchcraft, and fear of  
the devil as most boys of my age; but upon  
becoming a man”—Mr. Soppy gave a single  
but significant knock with the broad palm  
of his right hand on the left of his breast—  
“I looked upon such tales as all mihi, as  
we said at Hoxford, and Elizabeth Martin.  
In short, Martha, I settled in my own mind  
they were flams; and yet my grandmother  
wished me to believe to the last hour of her

prolonged life that she had herself seen a witch drowned in a pond, several of her neighbours present having thrown her in, and no hand allowed to help her out. I not only now," continued Mr. Soppy, "entertain the greatest respect for the truth of my old grandmother's story, but am as firm a believer in ghosts as that intelligent old woman was."

Martha continued her employment, but said nothing.

"I never shall be myself again," whimpered the speaker. "It's against the laws of unerring mathematicks that I should be. Having beheld a ghost, I'm doomed to everlasting funk, from which there's no escape, world without end, amen!"

"How do you know it was one?" inquired Dame Soppy, quietly, as if at least she had not been disturbed by any such apparition.

"How do I know it was one?" repeated he, looking amazed at the question. "Didn't I see it, she or he, as the case may be, with

my own heyes? Do you, Martha"—Mr. Thomas Soppy was waxing warm—"presume to throw unpleasant and irritating doubts upon the plain, unvarnished statement of the husband of your bosom? D——n it, Missis Soppy, limit your lengths, ma'am, if you wish, desire, or expect to escape a common assault!"

Dame Soppy dropped her knitting needles, and, folding her arms collectedly across her lap, looked in the direction of what may be called the straight line of the countenance of the husband of her bosom. There was no mistaking the cool determination of that look, and Mr. Thomas Soppy both winced and flinched under it. Her turn had come at last, and unexpectedly, and he knew that she knew that he knew it.

Mr. Soppy was ready to apologise, but felt that it was too late. Discretion coming to his aid, he said nothing, but secretly wished he was alone in bed, with the clothes over and above his ears.

"And so to hard words you threaten blows, eh?" said Dame Soppy, with a brightness in her eyes which proved rather too dazzling for her husband to view attentively without the assistance of smoked glass.

Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas Soppy—in shaking, uncertain accents, expressed himself more than prepared to make all possible reparation, and appealed pathetically to the excited state of his feelings under the abnormal and spiritual influence of ghosts.

"Bother ghosts!" ejaculated the active partner of his toils.

Mr. Soppy was overcome, and looked in that condition, whatever it might be.

"You've often told me what you think I am," resumed Dame Soppy, "now listen to what I know you are."

Mr. Thomas Soppy requested to be excused in words little short of plaintive. It was useless, however, and he knew that she knew that it was.

"You're a lazy—"

Mr. Soppy pressed the palms and fingers of his hands together in the form of a fervent petition.

“Cowardly——”

Mr. Soppy felt, however, that the truth was being spoken, and, as it was unanswerable, said nothing in reply.

“Empty-headed——”

Mr. Soppy raised a hand and gave his brow a vigorous polish, as if to assure himself that it was the identical head to which reference was being made.

“Shallow-pated, duck-brained, chicken-hearted, goose-tongued, drivelling, snivelling, sneaking, listening, peeping, scringing, bow-legged old bumble-bee. That’s what you are, and I’m ashamed of you, and if there was a grain of modesty in ye—which there isn’t—you would be ashamed of yourself.”

“Oh, Martha!” ejaculated Mr. Soppy, in piteous accents, “spare my legs, however stiff you may lay it on my morals.”

“I’ll spare nothing belonging to ye,” re-

joined Dame Soppy, in scarcely fair condition, however, to proceed from shortness of breath, for her voice was raised far above the usual pitch.

“I'll take my gruelling like a Christian,” returned Mr. Soppy, in a voice trembling with emotion. “But please to recollect that bow-legged, old bumble-bees have their feelings, Martha.”

“If I remember yours, Thomas Soppy,” added she, in the same sharp, acute tone, “I cannot call to memory when mine had much of your consideration.”

“If matters can be mended by a handsome apology, only say the word and it's done,” said Mr. Soppy, with the flourish of a hand which bore the effect of more triumphant occasions, pressing it, as he did, on the left of his breast.

“I want no nonsense,” replied Dame Soppy, maintaining the same high pressure of severity in her address, “and, what's more,” continued she, “I'll have none.”

"Then tell me what you *do* want, Martha," pleaded he, in a mild voice and meek manner, "that instead of being serpents—as it appears to me we are just now—we may be doves again."

"To begin with, then," said Dame Soppy, sharply, "and in order that you may not be set down as a greater fool than you look—"

Had a single pellet of number six shot struck Mr. Thomas Soppy's nose on the most sensitive part at a short range, and with a fair charge of gunpowder, he could not have given a more decided flinch.

"You'll not say another word about this ghost story," continued she. "It not unfrequently happens that one fool makes many, and it only has to get abroad that we've got a wraith here for the place to be watched night and day, and a set of gapers make the country round full of idle gossip about us."

"But Harry Girling and his daughter—"

"Must be taught to hold their tongues as well as you," interrupted Dame Soppy, "and it may be that I shall give them a lesson, as soon as you have learnt yours, which they won't be likely to forget very soon."

"There are some things I soon make myself master of, Martha," rejoined he, placidly, "and you have quite removed the mote from my mind's heye respecting your injunctions upon this subject. Bowing to sooperior authority as I have done from my youth upwards, I at once and unconditionally renounce the devil and all his works; but that it was something of the kind I saw gliding along the portrait-gallery last night, in the light of the moon, I feel persuaded."

"You had no business to be there," returned his wife, tartly, "and were only dogging my footsteps about the house."

"That may be," added Mr. Soppy; "but you should recollect, Martha, that curiosity is only found in inquiring minds. I will,

however," continued he, "keep my thoughts in silence to myself upon this matter, and say nothing more about it, beyond expressing the hope that, disliking more than ever to be alone, you'll give me your manly support always when it's dark, and as much as possible when it's not ; for my nerves are none of the strongest."

"There's nothing to be frightened at," observed Dame Soppy, quietly resuming her knitting.

"I wish I could think so, Martha," responded he, in a whine of distrust, "for then I should be a bolder man than I am at the present moment. If I could but believe," continued Mr. Soppy, "that there was nothing to fear, what a plucky fellow I should become."

Perhaps the argument was exhausted, for Dame Soppy gave no reply, and her companion was left to ponder upon it without interruption as long as he pleased, and per-

haps, from the expression upon his rueful countenance, longer than quite coincided with his suppressed wishes.

## CHAPTER VIII.

RUMOURS were afloat in Newmarket that the once “Prince of the Turf,” Colonel Leferne, had the nucleus of a racing stud again in training at the Heather House stable in the shape of a single colt, sire unknown. As the son of Queen Mary, by Gauntlet, by Bright Steel, by Helmet Plume, however, he drew the eyes, as it was reported, of the best judges of horseflesh in the world, far and wide—meaning of course the inhabitants of Newmarket,—in a condensed focus upon him, and the unanimous judgment pronounced, as by one voice, was that, if he continued to grow the right way instead of the wrong, if his legs stood the necessary amount of work, if his wind re-

mained sound, and he did not turn either whistler or confirmed roarer, if he continued to take his full allowance of corn daily without interruption, if his feet remained free from corns, bruises, and casualties, if his heels did not crack, if his hocks remained free from curbs, his fore legs from splints, if no screw was loose from the tips of his ears to his fetlock joints, and, above all, if he had the flying pace and game heart of his mother, he would make a race-horse. In this opinion Newmarket was unanimous to a man.

Like most places of any note or distinction, Newmarket possessed one of those representative characters known as “the oldest inhabitant,” who boldly declared that, “well and fit at the post, he should expect to see him take a deal o’ beating.” The parrot at the “Greyhound” was even more decided in expressing her indirect opinion concerning the qualifications of the Unknown, for she continually announced to

the customers at the bar that “the colonel ’ll win the Derby.” Guttural was the sound, but Polly placed her head askew as she spoke the prophetic words clear enough to be heard with great distinctness, and, partly closing one eye, looked quite as cunning and well-informed as some of her hearers.

“The colonel ’ll win the Derby,” repeated she.

“I hope he may,” responded a voice. “I do *so*,” and there stood in a negligent, easy, self-possessed attitude, at the bar of the “Greyhound,” Billy Bottles, with outward and visible signs of vast improvement in his sublunary fortunes substituted for his misfortunes.

In his own opinion, endorsed by the reflection of the looking-glass—four inches by two—which he consulted and was known to be anything but flattering in effect, he was well dressed, and looked on such excellent terms with himself as scarcely ad-

mitted of the smallest space for improvement. His light-corded trowsers might be tight, and consequently "horsey," and the waist of his dark-green cutaway coat was rather long, with the brass buttons, of the basket pattern, placed wide apart behind, and evidently in accordance with special injunctions given to the tailor. A bright blue cravat, with a loud white spot on its surface, was tied with artistic taste round his throat, above which stood two collars of great depth, rounded off at the points, and of uncomfortable stiffness. The coat being fastened by a single button across the chest, secreted the motley vest of bright and varied hues in part; but what was visible might have led to the inference that it was intended, from its great length, to shelter and protect his knees. A shining, narrow-brimmed hat, stuck jauntily on one side, and nothing more seems necessary to add to the minute personal particulars of Billy Bottles as he stood at the bar of the

“Greyhound,” a gratified listener to the oracle of the parrot.

With a benign expression upon his countenance he regarded the prophetic bird through the bars of her cage, and seemed to derive secret gratification in encouraging her to repeat the words which fell so musically upon his tympanum.

“She’s a miracle,” remarked the wearer of a small white apron about the size of a bishop’s, and, as would appear, from anything to the contrary, for as useless a purpose, behind the bar of the establishment. “She’s a miracle,” repeated the wearer of the apron, “and says wot she thinks, not wot she hears.”

Billy Bottles darted an incredulous look at the speaker, as if the assertion was to be received with considerable doubt.

“She’s a wonder to think,” resumed the wearer of the apron, folding his arms slowly across his breast, “and often picks out a good thing when the weights are out.”

The speaker evincing the utmost seriousness of tone and manner, Billy Bottles listened with interest, mingled however with distrust.

"In handicaps she's good," continued the wearer of the apron, "but nothing comes near her weight for age judgment. For the Two Thousand, Derby, and Leger, I always follow our parrot."

"The colonel 'll win the Derby," now came from the throat of the bird, as, with an eye half closed, she seemed ready to complete a wink not quite determined upon.

"She means the owner of the Unknown," said the wearer of the apron, in a confidential whisper. "I never heard her yet give the name o' the colt."

"Why's that?" asked Billy Bottles.

"No one knows but herself," replied the wearer of the apron, "but there's something in it, I'll be sworn. A man's brains sometimes wins a race. P'raps," continued

he, "it will be more head than heels in the one she's thinking about."

Billy Bottles now placed his nose close to the cage, and, peering through the bars, seemed to invite the bird to make a communication of her secret. She was not, however, to be cajoled into revealing it, and, placing her head on one side again, with half-closed eye looked at him without uttering a word.

"She sees now," added the wearer of the apron, "that you want her to speak, and the consequence is nothing'll persuade her to say one word. You might wring her head off first."

"If she only speaks the truth," replied Billy Bottles, "I prefer that she should keep her head on. I do so."

"Your money's on the Unknown then?" said the wearer of the apron, in the form of a question.

"I should just say it was," replied Billy Bottles, in a manner which might have con-

veyed the supposition that the coffers of the Bank of England were at stake.

"Ha!" exclaimed the wearer of the apron, "I never plunge. If there's more danger in one thing than another, it's plunging. When you put your pieces down, I say, put 'em down cautiously, and then, with a bit o' luck, you may take up a few more in the shape of winnings."

"The cautious stay well, and he who waits longest generally gets all he wants," philosophically rejoined Billy Bottles. "He does *so*."

The wearer of the white apron nodded a silent approval.

"The devilish difficult part of the business is," continued Billy Bottles, "to sit still, with hands down, and wait long enough."

The proprietor of the apron repeated his nod.

"Talking makes me thirsty," added Billy Bottles. "Let's have a pint of ale. Shall we toss for it?"

A sixpence was sent spinning in the air,  
and as it fell flat on the counter the wearer  
of the white apron cried,

“ Head.”

Billy Bottles removed his hand from  
covering it, and it was “ tail.”

## CHAPTER IX.

IN one of the rooms of the patrician hotel of Newmarket, "The Rutland Arms," Colonel Leferne reclined on a sofa one morning after breakfast-time, but not after breakfast, for the varied edibles remained on the table before him precisely in the same condition as they had been left by the officious waiter. A loose morning-robe was girdled carelessly round his waist, and, with slippered feet, he lounged in the idlest of positions with upturned face, smoking a cigar. The puffs of grey-white smoke curled in eddying circles upwards from his lips, and, as he watched them melting away from his view, he might be thinking, perhaps,

that much of the past with him had left remains about as transient.

“But my object was gained,” said he, aloud, and the words sounded as if in reply to some rebellious reflections. “I determined to become the most conspicuous man of fashion of the day, and he who occupies a pedestal far above the heads of others must pay, in some form or other, the price for the position. I paid for mine, and, now it’s gone, I fear that, like a child with a lost or broken toy, I’m ready to quarrel with myself for having been its possessor. To be, however, at enmity with oneself is anything but stoicism, and I must support the creed I profess.”

With this he raised himself with a languid effort from the sofa, and drew from one of the pockets of his robe a small, dark blue glass vial, protected with a piece of white leather above and around the stopper. Pressing two fingers upon his right wrist, he counted in silence the throbbing pulse,

and, from the movement of his lips, continued doing so for some brief seconds.

"What a contradiction life itself is!" at length ejaculated he, regarding the vial with a steadfast look as it lay in the open palm of one of his hands. "Three drops of this would bid the pendulum stop, and yet, when it begins to beat faintly, I must swallow a measured one to keep the damaged machine moving on. So that which would readily kill holds for a time death at bay!"

Whether this special train of thought would have been continued must remain a matter of conjecture; but it was interrupted by a modest knock at the door, as if through the agency of clenched knuckles, followed by the granted permission for the disturber to enter the apartment without further ceremony. With great promptness the door gaped open, and spat forth Johnny Tadpole, manifested in neat, if not regal, attire, and looking the new-blown pink of Newmarket

stable-boys. As became a properly-disciplined, well-mannered Newmarket stable-boy, Johnny raised a finger and thumb to his forehead, and, clutching a lock of hair trained in the form of a duck's tail in the centre, pulled it straight over his nose, as an outward mark for the inward and, therefore, invisible respect he felt for being in the immediate presence of a superior, and there left it. With his eyes fixed upon the floor, Johnny Tadpole felt that the penetrating gaze of Colonel Leferne was upon him, and that he was being surveyed with great minuteness and perspicuity. First his shoes, on the polished surface of which a kitten might have frisked with the reflection of herself, were subjected to close examination; then the neat gaiter adorned with a row of mother-of-pearl buttons followed in turn. As a matter of regular course, the breeches came next, and, looked at only in the light of breeches of a miniature kind, they might have defied, perhaps, a great

deal of criticism. The coat followed—and a little, bob-tailed, cutaway, close-fitting, single-breasted, pepper-and-salt garment it proved to be without any corroborative testimony—and a purple and orange silk neckerchief, in all the splendour of the Leferne colours, completed the task of the eye-witness.

“Well,” exclaimed the colonel, in a tone which sounded somewhat sharp to the ears of Johnny Tadpole, “what have you to say?”

“If you please, sir,” began Johnny Tadpole, having acquired his lesson by heart on his way, but with too much fear of the august presence in which he found himself to raise even his eyes from the carpet—“if you please, sir,” repeated he, “Mister Mark Rookson has sent me to say, sir, that the colt was never better in his life than he is this morning.”

“So far so good,” rejoined the colonel, with a deeply-drawn breath, and as if speaking to himself.

"He was as fresh and playful as a kid, sir," continued Johnny, gaining confidence as he proceeded, "when I dressed him after exercise, and kept up a reg'lar fire o' kicks the whole time."

"He knows how to use his heels, then, like his mother, eh?" rejoined the colonel.

"They say, sir," returned Johnny, beginning to feel himself possessed of a few additional degrees of assurance, "that one handier with his heels was never trained in our great stable."

"I know what Rookson thinks of the Unknown," said the colonel, "for he deceives no one. But what," continued he, smiling, much to the relief of his listener, "does your great stable say of him?"

"We, sir," responded Johnny Tadpole, swelling slightly with pride, for there was not room for much enlargement—"we, sir," repeated he, "never speak about our 'osses outside our stable, but inside our stable

we talk among ourselves, partic'lar after dinner."

"I should like to hear a little of what has passed," returned the colonel, "when my colt has been the subject of conversation, as I suppose he must have been."

"Very often, sir, I assure ye," added Johnny Tadpole; "and when he and I first arrived we were put through what is called the chaff mill. Having made a sort of confession, sir," continued he, "that I once looked after a small dairy, I caught it hot about the cow with the iron tail, I can tell ye; and, when it was found out that our colt was entered for his engagements 'sire unknown,' I came in for rather more than my fair share of pepper."

"This is just what I wish to hear," remarked the colonel, with portrayed interest in the narrative. "Go on."

"In a short time, howsomdever," resumed the speaker, "there was a great change, sir,

for the better in this respect. With me up —and the Unknown never goes so free as when I'm up—it was soon seen that he could pull over every one of the young 'uns in his exercise gallops, and, after a rough up with three clinkers one morning before it was broad daylight, he became, sir, the pride and hope of our great stable."

"That was the trial Rookson referred to," observed the colonel, as if speaking to himself.

"Very likely, sir," rejoined Johnny Tadpole; "but trials with us are kept as secret and silent"—here he dropped his voice with dramatic effect—"as the tomb. Nobody is allowed to think about the trial of a crack, much less to speak about it, and when it gets wind, sir, depend upon it it's from having been watched by some touting cove on the look out."

"You mean to say, then," returned the colonel, "that you are trustworthy."

"Ask Mister Rookson, sir," added John-

ny, becoming somewhat warm upon the subject; "he will bear me out, sir, that we stable-boys are too fond and proud of our 'osses to do them any wrong, and often and often when many things might be said and done, for which a good price would be paid, no sum of money could bribe any one of us to split or nobble."

"It is more frequently suspected than committed," said the colonel, "I believe."

"People talk about trainers, jockeys, and stable-boys being thieves, sir," continued Johnny Tadpole, now fairly heated, "and judge of the conduct of others by what they would do themselves if they had the chance. Now I know through Mister Samuel Wideo, who taught me to write, and having been in the great Heather House stables for several months past, that, with a wonderful many opportunities of feathering their own nests at the expense of their masters, it's seldom indeed that a robbery takes place. I don't mean to say, sir, that one never

does. A few of the family of the Armstrongs may always be found, and they'll pull a hoss now and then. It happens also that hoccusing is not altogether unknown, and it may still be remembered that a blow across the hock with the handle of a fork has stopped a hoss from winning a race before now. I don't believe much in pisining, sir."

The colonel at this moment, and as if by instinct, placed a hand in the pocket of the robe in which was the blue glass vial.

"From what I've heard," continued Johnny, "I've no doubt but hosses have been pisoned, but that's a long time ago, when nobblers were a great deal more ignorant and consequently bigger fools than they are at present, although not, perhaps, bigger rogues, because I don't believe that's possible. If a hoss is to be made safe without the help of Captain Armstrong, I've heard say, sir, that a little emetic powder rubbed over his gums is all that is neces-

sary. A painted bit has been used before now, and this will make him as sick and faint as a child with the measles. But as innocent a mode as any, perhaps, is to let him drink half a pail o' water just before he leaves the stable to start for a race. Nothing can make him safer than that, if what I am told is true."

"And yet upon the whole," observed the colonel, "you think these several means for knaves to enrich themselves are not often applied."

"I'm sure they are not, sir," replied Johnny Tadpole, "and, considering the many baits that are held out for wrong to be done, it's wonderful—let people think and say what they please—how seldom a race is sold. Of course, sir," continued he, rolling his head from side to side, "if it doesn't come off right, or as it was expected, somebody must be blamed, and then people begin to cry out about being robbed; but if they knew the hard and difficult work

it is to train a race-oss; the little that'll upset him; his being in full-bloom to-day, and pounds and pounds worse to-morrow; the chances and accidents of the race itself; the blunders that will and do happen in private trials——”

“There has been no mistake committed with that of the Unknown, I hope,” interrupted the colonel, feverishly.

“You needn’t fear that, sir,” responded Johnny, with unequivocal confidence. “The weight was up, which is a secret to all but Mister Rookson and yourself; but, whatever it was, the trial was true. Mister Rookson, sir, never makes the smallest allowance in the scales. A trial with him means the asking of a real question, and when the answer’s given it may be depended upon like gospel truth.”

“And you all think that we shall win the Criterion to-day?” said the colonel, reddening suddenly as he spoke.

“With one accord, sir,” replied Johnny,

giving a pull at the straight piece of hair over his nose.

"Is Wideo here?" asked the colonel.

"Mister Samuel Wideo," responded Johnny, "has left the cows to take care o' themselves, sir, and may be found at 'The Greyhound,' in all probability, listening to the parrot that's learnt to say—nobody knows how—you'll win the Derby, sir."

"It will be a great turn in my fallen fortunes if I should," said the colonel; but he spoke in that low voice which was heard only by himself.

"The parrot at 'The Greyhound,' sir," resumed Johnny, apparently determined not to drop the subject with undue haste, "is looked upon as a bird, by some people, as not belonging exactly to this world, sir."

"What world does she belong to?" asked the colonel, in the old languid tone and manner. "I've heard something about her oracular powers."

"Opinions differ as to that, sir," replied

Johnny Tadpole ; “ but some think she was hatched from brimstone heat where common feathers soon scorch.”

“ You speak of a temperature too high to be agreeable,” rejoined the colonel.  
“ Having fulfilled your mission, leave me.”

“ Am I to say anything to Mister Rookson, sir ?” inquired Johnny, preparing to obey the order with lingering footsteps.

“ That I shall be with him immediately,” replied the colonel. “ Nothing more.”

In respectful silence Johnny Tadpole once more had recourse to the lock of hair over his nose, pulled it, and departed.

## CHAPTER X.

THE seasons of the year are popularly supposed to comprise the equal number of four; but in Newmarket there is but one, beginning with the Craven Meeting and ending with the Houghton. No other season is acknowledged, or claims the smallest attention at Newmarket. With the first race, spring begins; with the last, winter sets in. Ten seasons are equal to ten years, not forty within the same space of time.

The season—there being but one—was waning to its close, and the day for the decision of the “Criterion” had arrived. Rumours were afloat and reports had been circulated that the great Heather House stable was sanguine in being able to furnish

the winner in a dark colt—sire unknown—the property of the once greatest patron of the Turf in its history. Years, however, had fled since the Leferne colours had been carried to the front, or, indeed, had been even seen, and things out of sight soon pass away from the memory. The colonel had been a terror to all who had “taken liberties with his horses,” but this was a long time ago, and those who were rash enough to take liberties, had been replaced by others who had not had the opportunity of committing a corresponding mistake.

A dark colt—sire unknown—to beat the best of his year.

Such was the task set for Queen Mary’s son to accomplish upon one bright autumnal day, when the shades, shadows, and silence of Newmarket had given place to one of its periodical intervals of normal excitement. If not crowded, the Heath was thronged with anxious and eager spectators, and in knots and groups the forthcoming test

of “the best of his year” was being freely discussed with the difference of public opinion which generally exists when conflicting interests are at stake. It was admitted, however, without one dissentient voice, that on his mother’s side nothing could be wanting for a race-horse of the first-class; but for the sire to be “unknown,” men shook their heads, and shrugged their shoulders in contemptuous silence.

With a weak, uncertain gait, and bending forward as he walked, leaning heavily on a stout cane, a tall, military figure—albeit not upright—might have been seen walking alone towards the starting-post of “the turns of the lands in.” Not the slightest notice was taken of him, and he took no heed of anyone or anything as he passed along with his eyes bent steadfastly on the greensward. A few short years before, and the scene was different. Upon that solitary man the gaze of the enraptured crowd was fixed as if some idol drew and riveted its

attention, and now he was a stranger where he was once worshipped, and alone.

Familiar shouts occasionally fell upon his ear, and, as he paused and listened, a smile, which seemed to come from a melancholy thought, flickered like a faint, dying light over his features.

"I'll lay against the Unknown," was heard clear and distinct above the babel of voices in the distance.

"Be careful, whoever ye may be," muttered Colonel Leferne, continuing to listen as he leaned upon his cane.

"Ten to one in hundreds against the Unknown," cried the same voice.

"I hope Rookson's commissioner is not far off that speculator," observed the colonel, communing with himself.

"I'll do it again," was the shout from the same stentorian lungs, after a short pause.  
"A thousand to a hundred against the Unknown."

"My money is being invested, I hear," remarked the colonel, still thinking aloud. "Rookson is carrying out my orders to put on"—his lips became pressed together as he spoke, but not before he muttered—"the last shilling I can pay. That may be lost—but not my honour."

"Ten to one bar one," was the repeated cry, and by the same voice.

A momentary lull in the offers against Queen Mary's son followed.

"Six to four on the field," shouted the same persevering bookmaker.

"Safe betting as a rule," observed the colonel, continuing to listen to the cries from the ring. "Short odds secure large gains."

"I'll lay against all these runners," was the halloo now raised far above the din.

"There's one among them," returned the colonel, sarcastically, as he walked gently forward towards the starting post, assisted

by his cane, “I would recommend your reserving for some other occasion.”

Whether the suggestion was adopted or not is of little moment, and which would entirely depend upon causes over which it could have neither direct nor indirect control; but there still appeared to be an eager desire on the part of more than one in the ring to “lay against all these runners.”

“A wholesome sedative will be administered presently,” soliloquized the colonel, as he glanced at the dial of a watch which he took from the pocket of his waistcoat. “If I am not mistaken”—a slight shudder ran through his frame as he uttered these words—“an impressive silence will follow this demonstrative opposition. Something,” continued he, “tells me within that it will be so, as it did in bygone days, when success was at hand, and yet it may be but deceptive hope. Well, be it so! The die is cast!”

The chain of his thoughts was now

broken by the coming to his side, with a strong and sudden pull on the curb chain, of a mounted horseman riding a thick-set, well-proportioned chestnut cob, whose flanks were heaving evidently from the distance he had accomplished in the time given him for that purpose. It was Mark Rookson's pony, as well known at Newmarket as the forlorn old red betting-post on the heath, and the rider of Mark Rookson's pony was Mark Rookson himself. Like the pony he bestrode, he was short-limbed, and bore, with striking resemblance to the pony, the outward and visible effects of either taking most judicious care of himself or having particular and tender solicitude bestowed upon him. The effect being the same, the causes at least were not antagonistic. Health glowed in a visage the direct opposite of pale or lantern-jawed, and good-humour, with a sanguine temperament, was portrayed as the index to

the attributes of character in Mark Rookson's rubicund and cheery countenance.

"Your commission has been executed, Colonel," said Mark Rookson, putting a nervous tug upon the jaws of the chestnut cob which strained them to his chest, and turning sideways in his saddle as he spoke.

"At what odds?" briefly inquired the colonel.

"The five hundred, or, as we say, 'the monkey,'" replied Mark Rookson, laughing, "has been put on cleverly at an average of twelve to one, Colonel."

"That will do," rejoined Colonel Leferne, "and in this, as in everything in which you have been concerned for me, I am more than satisfied, even should the Unknown be last instead of first in the race."

"He'll beat more than will beat him," returned Mark Rookson, pulling up the collars of his shirt and settling his chin comfortably between them. "If he doesn't

quite win, Colonel, he'll stretch the neck of the one that does."

"Do you possess, at this moment, the same confidence in him that you did?" asked the colonel, and the lines in his features seemed more deeply furrowed as he spoke.

"Nothing has happened to make me alter my opinion," responded Mark Rookson. "I think we shall win; but, as this is the colt's first appearance in public, we must recollect that we are depending alone upon the private trial."

"Which is too often deceptive," returned the colonel, "to be pleasant to think of."

"Mistakes are sometimes made with trials," added Mark Rookson, "as in everything else; but, if an animal will only do his best when called upon, I seldom fail to get his measure. It now and then happens, however," continued he, "that, from fear of

a crowd, dislike to noise, hatred of anyone to ride him in the shape of a stranger, and other causes too numerous to mention, a nervous horse will refuse to make an effort in public, and then, Colonel, that upon which our hopes have rested is upset. The trial itself may have been correct to an ounce, but there is no guaranteeing that the form will be run up to in public."

"I almost fear that you are preparing me for disappointment," said the colonel, moodily.

"Fear nothing of the kind, sir," responded Mark Rookson; "but it is as well to remember what we have to depend upon. I think we shall win."

"No words were ever more musical to my ears," rejoined Colonel Leferne.

At this moment the Unknown, clothed from head to heel, with Samuel Wideo leading him, with a spotless pipe-clayed rein as white as snow, and with Johnny

Tadpole in the saddle, passed within a few yards of where Colonel Leferne and Mark Rookson stood. Bringing up the rear, and close behind, was the irrepressible Bottles, who completed the small group of the colonel's retainers, deeply interested in the approaching struggle for "the pride of place."

"We are going to saddle," observed Mark Rookson. "Don't you mean, sir, to see the finish?"

"No," replied the colonel, shaking his head, and touching his left breast slightly with the fingers of his right hand, "I'm not well enough for that, Rookson, to-day. Something here beats too fast already."

"You'll witness the start, then," rejoined Mark Rookson.

"Such is my intention," returned Colonel Leferne. "But you may be wanted. Don't let me detain you a moment longer."

Mark Rookson slackened the rein of the

chestnut cob, and his feet rattled responsively on the greensward as he galloped forward.

## CHAPTER XI.

“**S**IX furlongs, from the turn of the lands in,” was the distance set to be accomplished by the candidates for Criterion honours, and it must be a good colt, as the best judges in Newmarket declared to a man, to be returned the victor on the present occasion, as “the flyers of the year” were not only engaged in the race, but would, it was confidently announced, appear at the post.

A pale October sun was sinking in the west, throwing long unsymmetrical shadows on the ground, when straining eyes beheld, with palpitating hearts, the field of horses drawn up in an irregular line, ready for the

signal to start for “The Criterion Stakes, of 30 sovereigns each, 20 forfeit, for two years old. Colts 8 stone 8lbs, fillies 8 stone 6lbs. The winner of a £500 sweepstakes, including the winner’s own stake, with ten subscribers, to carry 4lbs extra, of two such stakes 7lbs extra. A winner of any other sweepstakes value £200, including the winner’s own stake, and not having less than ten subscribers, to carry 2lbs extra. Sixty-three subscribers.”

Such were the full published particulars and conditions of the prize for which thirteen competitors were now being marshalled to the post, among them a bay colt, sire unknown.

Mark Rookson had given the finishing touch to the toilet of Queen Mary’s son with his own hands, while Johnny Tadpole held the bridle of the chestnut pony a few yards removed, and looked on with a hard ball of emotion sticking in his throat which

threatened to choke him. Men, horses, and things, small and great, danced before his eyes, for his brain was in a whirl, and he looked sick, giddy, and pale. Still he looked on as steadily as he could, and made himself complete master of events that were passing before him, as well as circumstances of a dizzy description would permit.

If his uncertain vision did not deceive him, or play high jinks with what appeared plain, unvarnished facts, as opposed to the unreal phantasies of fiction, there stood the son of Queen Mary, by Bright Steel, by Helmet Plume, not only saddled, but mounted by "The Demon," arrayed in the gorgeous Leferne colours of purple and orange. Physically a small man, scaling eight stone two pounds as the lowest riding weight, "The Demon" was, nevertheless, a great man in more ways than one. Society in stays, with a white "choker" beneath a double-double Exeter Hall chin might have

sighed, with upturned eyes, "only a jockey," and yet that noble institution, perhaps, could not have boasted, with becoming meekness, that it ever had beneath the span of its roof one who had been more faithful to the trust and confidence reposed in him. "Only a jockey," and yet above the suspicion of the most suspicious, against whose honesty not a syllable of doubt was ever breathed. "The Demon" had earned for himself from long years of resistance to temptation, self-denial, painstaking obedience and courage, a reputation above which no step was practicable. The first of his order was "The Demon," and personified the consummate master of his art as he sat on the saddle of the Unknown with a graceful, easy bearing, waiting for a signal to ride for a life, albeit not known to him.

Johnny Tadpole's fascinated gaze was fixed on the Unknown and his rider. He knew that before, behind, and around were,

to him, other Unknowns and their riders; but he saw the shining coat of a single Unknown only glittering like shot silk in the pale rays of the setting sun, and but one rider decked in a purple satin jacket and orange cap. He could look at nothing else, and made no resistance to divert his view from the focus of attraction.

The moment appeared almost attained for the start to take place, when Mark Rookson suddenly jerked the reins from Johnny Tadpole's hands, and climbing into the saddle with a nimbleness of action scarcely to be believed, without being witnessed, for one "who had taken particular care of himself, or had had special care taken of him," sent the chestnut pony along towards the finish of "the turns of the lands in" at a pace evidently stimulated by a vigorous touch of the spur, and which the pony, as undeniably the best judge, might have considered in the more forcible light of "a dig."

Before Johnny Tadpole could recover himself from a kind of shock which vibrated through his nerves as if received through the medium of a galvanic battery, Mark Rookson and the chestnut cob were rattling away, and had almost reached the point of their destination, the winning-post, placed in conspicuous relief at the end of the six furlongs.

Leaning with both hands on his cane, with two hectic spots glowing like small furnaces in his cheeks, and bright, glassy eyes, Colonel Leferne stood watching, with compressed lips, every movement of the animal upon whose success rested the issue of "life or death." And yet, near as was the decision, his heart quailed not for a moment. The end was inevitable, and if met, the time would be shortened, nothing more or less. Such was the silent argument passing within, and which many a time had escaped his lips, when alone.

Strange indeed would it have been had the field of thirteen exhibited the same tractable and quiet disposition as that shown by Queen Mary's son, who was perfectly willing to be guided by "The Demon," either backward or forward, left or right, just as he was required to move or stand. No two-year-old at the post ever looked more noble and dignified, great as was the drawback in his lineage—sire unknown. It was not so, however, with some whose putative sires were remarkably well known and registered. Here and there a leg was lashed out in a manner likely to cause trepidation concerning fractures. One or two declined to go near the starting-point, and were alike as determined to resist arbitrary force as subtle stratagem. Rearing high in the air upon his hind legs, the son of a putative father took an impulsive dance of his own composition, and, almost losing his balance, threatened to stretch himself back-

wards on the greensward with his legs uppermost, and his rider flattened beneath the saddle which he graced with so much skill and apparent disregard to his own safety. Round turned another as if upon a pivot, and proved as deaf to persuasion as he seemed blind to the coaxing endearments lavished in vain upon him by his attendants. During this trying ordeal, however, the Unknown stood, with expanded nostrils and dilated eyeballs, as if chiselled from stone, moving only with the slight and imperceptible touch of the rein by "The Demon" to maintain the desired position for the start.

With both hands clasped upon the top of the cane, Colonel Leferne stood in a line with the unruly field, and, like his horse, betrayed little outward emotion at the scene before him, and in which he was interested beyond the power of language to describe.

Life or Death !

At the first attempt down went the flag, and off jumped the thirteen competitors as if touched by a spring which released each and all at one and the same instant. With a flash the purple jacket and orange cap were seen in the front ; but no sooner there than the practised eye of the colonel saw "The Demon" pull the Unknown back to take a less prominent place in accordance with the final orders he had received from Mark Rookson.

"He will not break *his* heart at the beginning," said the colonel to himself, and as he spoke he appeared to almost gasp for breath, "whatever may be the condition of *mine* at the finish."

A roar of voices, and then unbroken silence as if from the grave.

Colonel Leferne remained as if rooted to the spot, still resting in a bent position upon his cane ; but with a strained, eagle-eyed gaze turned in the direction of "the in"

from "the turn of the lands." Horses and men had quitted the spot, and he stood alone with his eyes fixed upon the whereabouts of an object he could not see; but which kept the look fixed and immutable.

"It is over," muttered he, "and the stake is either won or lost."

If life lives in but little there is no such length as that measured by the moments of suspense. Brief as was the space it seemed as if time had stopped before anything was visible in the shape of a mere speck in the distance which might be conjectured as the approach of the herald of the success of the Unknown or his defeat. On came the speck, growing into a spot, and then into something larger as its nearer approach became more manifest. A pair of heels, in responsive action to a pair of arms, were seen hard at work as if urging to an effort of more than his best speed a chestnut pony, with his ears thrown back, outstretched

neck, and legs extended to their fullest capacity. A few lengths nearer and it required no powerful eyesight to discover that the speck, now become much larger than any ordinary spot, was Johnny Tadpole and Mark Rookson's chestnut pony.

"We have won, Colonel," cried he at the pitch of a very shrill voice, as he arrived within range of a fair gun shot. "We have won, sir, through the mercy of Providence and the riding of 'The Demon,' by a short head."

"Was he weighed in before you started to bring me this result?" quietly asked Colonel Leferne, glancing suspiciously under his knitted and beetling brow, still resting on his cane.

"And passed 'all right,' sir," replied Johnny, in a paroxysm of pleasure displayed in tone, manner, and expression, as he pulled hard upon the reins and, coming to

a dead stop, sprang from the saddle with a light bound at the feet of the owner of the Unknown, the winner of the Criterion.

## CHAPTER XII.

IT almost demands an apology to add that an “ovation” followed the victory of the Unknown, as whoever or whatever achieves success in these alleged degenerate days is sure to meet with an “ovation,” if discordant voices raised to an unnatural pitch, and countenances wearing an expression of absolute frenzy, may be supposed to convey the effects of a triumph of any sort or kind. Hats were tossed in the air with a total disregard to their original cost or market value. Arms flourished madly above men’s heads, and legs kicked, capered, and danced in a manner approaching nearer the savage exhibition of the ancient Britons,

when under the influence of wild excitement, than what might have fairly been expected from a division, large or small, of a civilized modern community. Such, however, were the outward and visible signs of the "ovation," as Queen Mary's son, now closely hooded and clothed, walked daintily through the crowd with a proud bearing, on his way back to the Heather House stable. Samuel Wideo, by right and title conceded by the autocrat Mark Rookson, led the Unknown through the adulating crowd, while Johnny Tadpole, as a feather-weight of small specific gravity, bestrode the conqueror in a way which can scarcely be called the reverse of arrogant, for Johnny displayed a grandeur of person and as lofty a mien as a lord of very high degree or prince of the blood. There was no futile attempt to conceal the inordinate self-esteem which pervaded the whole of his little system as he sat on the pigmy saddle, girthed

across the back of the winner of the Criterion, but which, it is needless to add, was quite large enough for him, and with palpable room to spare.

Forgetful, perhaps, of all the antecedents of his life,—even to the special notice of the Government, represented by the policeman on the beat, in earlier if not happier days of his youth—there sat Johnny Tadpole, the admired, as he fully believed, of all admirers, guarded in the immediate rear by Billy Bottles, who handled a stout ash stick in a threatening manner to those who presumed to press too closely upon the flanks and hocks of the now idol of Newmarket—sire unknown.

“Keep off, d’ye hear?” cried he, and then, as if no doubt should exist as to the object of his address being sensible at least to feeling, if not to sight, he made a thrust with the point of his stick straight at the ribs of the offender, which brought forth a

sharp ejaculation of the vowel “ O !” “ I’ll give ye something to holla about presently,” continued Billy, with a vicious swing of the stick, which might have left an ugly mark upon anyone within reach. “ I’ll give ye something to holla about presently,” repeated he, “ if you don’t give us room. I will so. Keep off, d’ye he---ar ?”

Space being accorded by the multitude through this practical argument, the procession took its way into the High Street of Newmarket, gathering in numbers as it went, and each and all of the admiring throng feasting their eyes on Queen Mary’s son as “ if appetite grew upon what it fed.”

“ What about his sire now ?” shouted a diminutive man divided into two equal parts of jacket and gaiters, as he stood at the doorway of the old-fashioned hostelry, “ The White Lion.”

Samuel Wideo glanced at the speaker with a broad grin upon his features. They

had passed “a quiet evening,” together, and their joint and several sentiments culminated at the termination of the “quiet evening” in the unity of opinion that “a good oss was neither better nor wuss for having no father at all.”

“Talk about fathers,” remarked the diminutive man divided into two equal parts of jacket and gaiters, towards the termination of the “quiet evening,” passed with Samuel Wideo at “The Greyhound,” when the parrot was moody and silent, and seemed to be asleep, but, nevertheless, had one eye half open, and was gathering knowledge for vaticination. “Talk about fathers,” repeated he, with portrayed contempt in tone and manner. “Show me a race-oss, that’s all I want to see in this bless—ed world, and I’ll ask no questions about his father. What’s his father to me?” he, continued with keen-edged sarcasm, and fixing a look of mingled anger and brandy on the

brain upon his companion ; he seemed to be grinding himself up to a fine point of excitement, which threatened to leave little power of discrimination between friend and foe. “ I say, sir,” resumed jacket and gaiters, “ what the devil’s his father to me ? ”

The parrot woke up at this juncture, and, giving her feathers a vigorous shake, repeated the query in words almost as distinct and clear as the diminutive man himself, and concluded with his favourite peroration :

“ The colonel’ll win the Derby.”

“ So say I,” cried the two equal parts of jacket and gaiters, “ and so say all of us. Fathers be d——d ! ”

With this expletive the “ quiet evening ” was brought to a close, and the next opportunity which Samuel Wideo had of seeing the two equal parts was as he stood at the doorway of “ The White Lion,” when he again referred to the subject by shouting,

“ What about his sire now ? ”

With a friendly recognition, which the broad grin was meant to convey, Samuel Wideo continued to head the van of the procession as its course was directed through the High Street of Newmarket.

It was a grand sight—at least, so Johnny Tadpole thought. At the head and front walked Samuel Wideo, with evidently no more thought of the dairy at Bromley Marsh than if that institution had never been established. Then the Unknown, with as proud a step as any peacock of the spring, carrying that condensed essence of self-conceit, Johnny Tadpole, and the rear brought up by Billy Bottles, wielding unregulated power and protection in the shape of a long, tough ash stick.

“Have a care!” cried he, as the colt, with a sudden movement, displayed anger at the foremost part of the throng pressing closely upon him. “Have a care,” repeated he, raising the stick with a threatening gesture,

"or more than one of ye will be kicked to heaven in a twinkling. It will be short and sharp work, I can tell ye. It will *so*."

Taking the warning in the spirit in which it was given, and a more earnest one could scarcely have been exhibited, the crowd fell back, and Queen Mary's son strode along as dignified as before, with his squarely-cut, bang tail swinging like a pendulum, almost level with his hocks, and with the proud gait of the hero that he was.

Distance being regulated by time, "The Greyhound" was soon reached, and as the procession passed that hostelry, renowned for wine in which the bee's wing might always be seen to float when examined critically, a loud but guttural voice was heard to exclaim,

"The colonel 'll win the Derby."

"Do you hear that, Sam?" cried the guard of honour bringing up the rear.

Sam had heard the prophecy repeated

more than once during the course of the “quiet evening” with jacket and gaiters, and jerked his head on one side as a signal of the affirmative kind.

In a few succeeding minutes the wide gates of the adjacent yard to Heather House stable were thrown open, and the Unknown and his attendants were admitted in solemn silence and with courtly etiquette, as if the reception of the winner of a Criterion was a mere matter of form, and as an event to be looked upon in the light of a common occurrence. Stiffly and slowly the gates swung upon their hinges and closed again, and the admiring crowd was left cut off from the object of its homage and devotion.

## CHAPTER XIII.

FOR some time past Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas Soppy—had passed a most unhappy existence in an atmosphere of quaking tremor. He was always in a shake concerning something of the past, present, or to come. Like the loosened strings of a harp, his nerves were unstrung, and often, with unshed tears swimming in his eyes, he reclined in the easy, caressing chair in the still-room, ruminating sorrowfully that they, possibly, might never be screwed to their former pitch of tension again. Thus musing, Mr. Soppy would shake his head, rub his nose on the back of a hand, sigh, sob, and snuffle.

Excited too as his feelings were morning, noon, and night—but especially at night—he had the great mortification of beholding a liberal measure of the exact opposite effect in those of Dame Soppy, who looked upon all occasions, and at all times and seasons, as cool and collected as the grave digger in “Hamlet.” She was never ruffled, and her homely cheeks were never blanched nor flushed as she came from the dark lone-depths of passages and galleries of the old Hall in the eventide, or went from his presence into them. It was not so, however, with him. Thomas Soppy had heard from Harry Girling’s own lips what he had once seen peering through the window of his cottage. He might have entertained some doubt had the story been narrated by his daughter only, but there was the corroborative testimony of the strong burly game-keeper himself, who kept the secret of what he saw in the ordinary conventional way

by communicating it to everybody he met in the strictest confidence, and “everybody” returned the compliment by a similar co-operative and general method of transmitting intelligence. Mr. Soppy heard, and, what is more to the purpose, believed. His faith was great in that which he had been told concerning the wraith haunting not only the precincts of Greatwood Park, but of the Hall itself. The gossips of the neighbourhood declared that an apparition might be seen, had been seen, and would continue to be seen in and around the old house, and that, doubtless, it was the wandering, disturbed spirit of a departed victim of one of the libertines of the old knightly family. As with most stories, whether ancient or modern, the facts given as matters of history varied in accordance with the imaginative powers of the several tellers of the tale ; but, whatever might be the variations in the narrative, Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas

Soppy—held the unwavering belief that in the cardinal points it was true. If his remarkably long and lop ears had not deceived him, there were sounds in the house which were difficult, if not impossible, to account for. If his eyes had not conjured up a mere phantom of the brain he had seen once in the moonlight, streaming through diamond panes of a window in the old portrait gallery, a shadowy unreal something which flitted noiselessly away at the farther end as he stood riveted to the spot with horror at what he saw. His conscience told him that he ought not to be there; for he was bound to admit to himself that he was playing the not unrehearsed part of spy and eavesdropper upon Dame Soppy's movements; but however open to censure and reproach his own conduct might be—such was his argument—it had nothing whatever to do with the “shadowy, unreal something.” There it was, or, at least, had been,

and as soon as he could recover his self-possession, and collect a few of his scattered senses to enable him to understand the helpless absurdity of being riveted to a spot, he turned upon his heel and bolted.

From that moment, however, he became a victim to fear. His diurnal, and particularly his nocturnal, life was passed in continually shaking at what he might see or hear at any given moment. Nothing could exceed in intensity his chronic trepidation. The malady took possession of each particular hair which fringed the circle of his bald and shiny head, making it stand up stiff and straight, and such was the sensitive condition of his nervous system that he was always ready to scamper off and hide himself like a frightened rabbit.

It was in the depressing light of an autumn day, when the sun had set, and the shadows cast by its last lingering rays had faded, when Mr. Soppy was sitting in the

still-room, dependent upon his own mental resources for companionship. Mr. Soppy was alone, and had been so much longer than was agreeable in a general point of view, or soothing in a particular one. Man being a gregarious animal, Mr. Soppy formed no exception in not being fond of solitude, more especially when it was dark, or rapidly becoming so. He had borne, and was bearing, the weary, irksome loneliness of his position with as much fortitude as he could summons, but it was an impossibility to conceal from himself that the demand for strength far exceeded the supply, and that the deficit increased momentarily.

Mr. Soppy had a natural prejudice, or an acquired repugnance, to owls, and, yet as Greatwood Park was a well-known favourite haunt for them, it was not a matter of surprise that one of these birds of the night should sail past the window of the still-room, within short range of his vision, on

her broad white pinions, like a ghost on the wing. It formed, however, an additional demand upon Mr. Soppy's deficient supply of courage, and he began to feel that the moment had almost arrived for a bolt.

"I can't stop here much longer," soliloquized he, "unless Martha comes to bear me company. I'm getting in what may be called, to use a forcible expression, a blue funk."

Mr. Soppy stretched his ears—and they seemed to prick forward with the action—for some welcome and familiar sound to lessen the oppressive weight which had sunk his animal spirits to a depth far below zero; but all he heard was the loud chirp of a cricket, and this, in a way quite unaccountable, seemed to increase, if anything, his agitated state of mind. Then there was the feeble sound of the old clock close at hand, which had been playing marker in a match with time so long that it was nearly worn

out, and appeared ready to succumb without further struggle to the general law of wear and tear. The tick-tock of the pendulum, as it swayed heavily to and fro, grated harshly on Mr. Soppy's tympanum, and his feelings at length becoming almost beyond control, he entertained an impulsive inclination to take off a shoe, and have a shy at the face which seemed to squint at him. A successful effort, however, rendered him master of this emotion, and, checking the wild, unregulated spirit of revenge, he rose with a hasty movement from his chair, and, looking around with a glance of mingled dread and suspicion, girded up his loins and "skedaddled." Undefined terror of something was at his heels, and Mr. Soppy displayed a nimbleness of pace and action of which a much younger man might well have been proud, admitting the exciting cause had not been "a blue funk."

Down a long, narrow, dark passage Mr.

Soppy went at full speed, running from something concerning which he could have rendered no explanation, and, terror lending wings to his footsteps, flying to some haven of peace, concerning which he had not the faintest idea. Without a momentary pause for either thought or breath, Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas Soppy—rushed to the end of the long, narrow, dark passage, and, the end being gained, turned to avoid flattening his nose against the abrupt face of a brick wall, and scudded—to use a nautical phrase—up a long, winding staircase three steps at a jump. Pursuing his career, Mr. Soppy arrived, from a law of necessity, at the last or highest step of the staircase, and then, cannoning against a sharp angular corner, grazed with effect the nearest elbow, and became sensible to what concussion means in the abstract. Checked, but not stopped, he again gathered up his loins, and continued his flight round the corner, leav-

ing it behind him with a fervent wish that he had never felt it. One or two more turns of a similar kind, but without collision, and Mr. Soppy, witnessed by the ancestral likenesses of the Lefernes of successive generations hung so long and drearily on the walls, flew along the old portrait-gallery, making the stern knights in harness, and powdered, rouged, and patched lady and belle of the olden time, smile in derision at the sight, for any evidence which can be offered to the contrary.

Before coming to the end of the long old portrait-gallery, Mr. Soppy became sensible also to what the want of breath means in its most literal sense. He felt that without a certain quantity in reserve it was impossible to draw much longer upon the balance in hand. Mr. Soppy slackened his pace, puffed, panted, and came to a full stop with a hand resting upon the fastening of a massive, frowning oak door at the end of the

old portrait-gallery, and seemed to hesitate whether he should open it or not. The pause, however, was but for a moment. Mr. Soppy turned the handle, and entering an apartment of large, dreary dimensions, known as the crimson-room, found himself suddenly confronted by the presence of Martha, who came with an athletic bound to where he stood, and, holding out both sides of the skirt of her dress between her respective fingers and thumbs, offered a somewhat imperfect screen to his vision, but a decided and substantial bar to his further ingress.

“What do you do here?” she said, in a suppressed tone and manner, which seemed to Mr. Soppy, in his then nervous condition, almost approaching the savage. “What do you do here?” repeated she.

“I thought,” began Mr. Soppy, as well as his loss of breath would permit, and making at the same time an unsuccessful attempt to

look beyond the screen both right and left, but it was dodged with consummate skill, "I thought to find you here, and here you are according-ly."

"Having found me," rejoined Dame Soppy, in a way which admitted of no misconstruction, "go back."

"But I can't sit below by myself any longer," expostulated he, "and retain my senses, Martha ; I can't, indeed."

"Go back," reiterated she, now pointing a straightened finger to the door by which he entered. "Go back. You're not wanted here."

Half the screen having been permitted to drop, Mr. Soppy took immediate advantage of the opportunity, and threw a forward, penetrating glance to the furthest end of the crimson-room, and as he did so the senses to which he had just referred seemed to take a hasty departure without leaving a trace of having been in immediate possession.

"Who or what's that?" cried he, seizing Dame Soppy in his arms and burying his face, in so far as it was possible to entomb it, in her remarkably flat bosom. "Who or what is that?" he repeated, in a frenzy of terror as he struggled to hide the whole of his features, but particularly his eyes.

In a firm grasp, which it is to be hoped was not designed to pinch him, Mrs. Soppy disengaged herself from his embrace, and giving him a shake the opposite of gentle, deliberately asked him what he meant.

"Mean?" and his voice sounded almost unearthly. "Look there!"

Dame Soppy, however, did not deign even to turn her head in the direction.

"Are you mad?" she asked.

"No," responded he, in piteous accents, "but soon shall be. Oh, Martha! Who or what's that? My head's a-swimming round. It is, indeed!"

It was a plain matter of fact that Mr.

Soppy's brain began a rotatory motion, and, the sensation increasing, it quickly left him in an undignified position upon the floor with his face upwards, and his limbs "spread-eagled."

Mr. Thomas Soppy had fainted.

## CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the absence of Samuel Wideo from the dairy in Bromley Marsh history is silent as to what became of the cows, and tradition lends no aid in the solution of the mystery. Things, however, may be accepted to have gone on to his satisfaction, or stood still as the case may be ; for upon his return no happier dairyman was ever beheld within a wide range of that flat and oozy land. The visions of his youth had returned. Buried and lost hopes had risen again. The impenetrable clouds of darkness which surrounded the horizon of his life had dispersed, and there stood Samuel Wideo himself once more, or as good a

counterfeit in every detail as might unsuspectingly be received and passed current for the original. Such was the buoyancy of his animal spirits upon his return from witnessing the signal triumph of Queen Mary's son, that it was generally believed in the vicinity of Bromley Marsh that he was invariably occupied in either singing or dancing, and that the two accomplishments were not unfrequently blended.

"It's come again ; our turn's come again," he would repeat, with a double shuffle of his squared-toed boots, and in a voice which warbled the happiness of a heart lighter than his heels. "You've only to wait patiently," continued he, "as in duty bound a Christian ought to do if he can, and if he can't to be as quiet and serene as circumstances will permit, and the trump card is sure to turn up when perhaps least expected."

If varied in its delivery the substance of

the soliloquy was still the same, and Samuel Wideo appeared never tired of the repetition.

There was scarcely a sufficient number of superficial inches of atmosphere of a healthy description in the parlour of the dairy one evening from the sanitary objection of its being over-crowded. Designed for two occupants, or at most three, strong pressure had been put upon space, and four might have been seen taking their ease in so far at least as it was possible for occasional twinges of cramp to permit the description of "taking their ease" to be literally in accordance with the fact.

"If we had here one of those unfurnished apartments of yours, Tom Soppy, in Greatwood Park," observed Billy Bottles, sending a cloud of tobacco smoke curling from his lips to the ceiling within easy reach of his head as he sat, "we should have a little more elbow room. I now know," continued

he, discursively, “what a mouse feels in a trap. I do so.”

“A mouse in a trap?” reiterated Samuel Wideo, with an approach of indignation in his speech and manner. “I hope I may say, William Bottles, that a mouse in *my* trap—if it deserves the name—would always find a nibble of cheese, and that I never robbed a canary bird of its sugar.”

“Well,” returned the imperturbable William Bottles, in no way disconcerted at the sarcastic tone of his host, “I have. But no offence, Sam. I only meant that a little more elbow room would be rather more pleasant.”

Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas Soppy—at this moment shook off a lethargic demeanour, and, rousing himself to action, expressed the anxious desire of both being heard and understood.

“I’m here,” began he, between a whine and a whimper, “under”—waving a hand

as he spoke—"a roof. A roof," continued he, with a decided tendency of melting into tears, "shelters this hoary head, and the winter's blast may do its worst. But, having changed the commodious apartments of Greatwood Park for what may be called a rather incommodious one, don't let us make it more inconvenient by quarrelling. Always look out for room when inclined for a row."

"Why so, sir?" innocently inquired Johnny Tadpole, who comprised the fourth, last, and least of the assembly.

"Because," replied Mr. Soppy, "if things come to extremities, you can dodge—as I did Martha upon the last connubial difference which led to our separation—a facer, and bolt for protection. Here I am," continued he, spreading out his arms, "without damage; but confined, as I now am, what would have been the consequences?"—here the speaker dropped his voice with great

dramatic effect—"they might have been sanguinary."

"Not beyond the nose, Tom," rejoined Billy Bottles, modifying the supposition.

"No, no," returned Mr. Soppy, "not beyond the nose. I did not wish my hearers to suppose that Martha would have gone beyond the nose; but if anyone present has ever received a straight-un from the shoulder on the tip, as I have more than once at Hoxford, then he will agree with me that nothing more is wanted to bring tears into his heyes."

"As to quarrelling among such old friends as we are," remarked Samuel Wideo, "whether in a room large enough to fight it out, or too small for a couple of tom-tits to settle their differences in, that's impossible. But I didn't particularly relish William Bottles speaking of himself in my crib as 'a mouse in a trap.' That's all."

"Such being the case," added Billy Bot-

tles, who found his unintentional offence rankling with the venom of a thorn in the breast of his host, “I beg to apologise. I do so.”

“A gentleman—the Colonel himself—could do no more,” observed Mr. Soppy, folding his arms deliberately across his breast, and referring to the ceiling. “The Colonel himself,” repeated he, “could do no more.”

“He’s not, though, one of the apologising sort,” remarked Samuel Wideo.

“Did you ever know him to give offence, Sam, in look, word, or deed?” asked Mr. Soppy.

“I’ve heard you say,” returned Billy Bottles, “that, in his young days——”

“He was playful,” interrupted Mr. Thomas Soppy. “He was certainly playful—decidedly playful. I have certainly known his bootmaker to introduce himself to my tailor in a way called practical.”

"By kicking ye downstairs, I suppose," suggested Samuel Wideo.

"You might guess again, Sam," replied Mr. Soppy, "and not be so near the mark. But, as I have said before, when the Colonel's toe of his boot produced a sort of shock to your system from the extreme rear, you felt, at least, that it was done by a gentleman."

"I can't quite see that, sir," deferentially remarked Johnny Tadpole. "A kick's a kick, let it come from what boot it may, and all I should think about would be it's weight."

"A very sensible observation, Taddy," acquiesced Samuel Wideo, rolling his head from side to side. "Sense," continued he, "will always beat nonsense."

Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas Soppy—felt much aggrieved at this, as it appeared to him, personal reference to a want of sense, and made up his mind to resent it effectually.

"Do you mean, Sam," said he, with vehemence of tone and ardour of manner, "to applaud this stable-boy's cackle——"

"Come, come, sir," interrupted Johnny Tadpole, instinctively turning up the cuffs of his coat, "I'm not going to stand this. If you want a round or two, I'm your man."

"Very plucky," added Samuel Wideo, admiringly, "for five stun three. Very plucky indeed!"

Mr. Soppy, feeling perhaps that he had gone too far, was desirous of retracing one or two of his steps taken in advance.

"If I have wounded your feelings," commenced he, turning his full, pale gooseberry eyes in a steady stare upon Johnny Tadpole, "by calling you a stable-boy, I withdraw the expression. If the term cackle is disagreeable, forget that I made it."

It now appeared to the reflective mind of Billy Bottles an opportune moment to act the part of peacemaker.

"It seems to me," began he, "that with all the good luck around us, and when we ought to be as chirpy as crickets, we're trying to make each other as miserable as possible. Here," continued Billy Bottles, warming on his subject, "is the colt that was dropped within a few yards from this very identical spot acknowledged to be the flyer of his year. His owner's won a good stake. We have our pockets lined with a liberal share. Taddy is home for a holiday. I'm here on leave to help him in doing nothing, and Tom Soppy's parted from his wife. What blessings we're all enjoying, if we did but value them!"

"My domestic relations with Martha," interposed Mr. Soppy, dolefully, "are tender subjects. They may be looked upon as blessings in one light—confidence being destroyed between us—but not in another. I miss her attention to my linen, and my little dinners are things to be thought of, but no longer enjoyed."

"In giving notice to quit the Colonel's service," observed Samuel Wideo, "was he surprised?"

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Soppy. "He was playing a soft tune with his fingers on the table after dinner, as usual, when I managed to screw up courage enough to tell him I wished to go. He simply stopped in a sort of quiet rub-a-dub, and told me to go and be d—d."

"Just like him," said Billy Bottles. "He asked no questions, I'll be bail!"

"Not one," replied Mr. Soppy. "Continuing his rub-a-dub with one hand, he pointed to the door with the other, and, seeing a flash in his eyes which could never be mistaken in a Leferne, I knew it was time to put the door of the apartment between the Colonel and me, and retired accordingly."

"You did *so*," rejoined Billy Bottles, "and thereby threw yourself out o' doors

into the cold, wide world. Some unfortunate scoundrels," continued he, "are pitched out o' winder against their will; but you, Tom Soppy, took a header as if thinking you were going to fall upon a bed of roses."

"It was impossible to stop and keep my senses," returned Mr. Soppy, his frame vibrating with a perceptible shudder.

"What senses?" curtly asked Samuel Wideo.

Mr. Soppy—Mr. Thomas Soppy—felt a slight degree of anger mingle with surprise at this question; but, recovering from the shudder, proceeded to give a placid reply.

"To see again what I saw," said he, in a voice deep and tremulous with emotion; "to hear again the sounds which I heard; to feel again Martha's rough handling, to put it mildly, and I should have become, Sam, blind, deaf, and a stiff-'un."

As he concluded his answer, Mr. Soppy

glanced around in search of sympathy, and found it.

"I'm glad to see you here, sir," returned Johnny Tadpole, "and think you were quite right to make a bolt of it; for, although I don't believe in ghosts myself, I've heard of many old women who do."

Whether a minute measure of sarcasm was intended to be conveyed in this observation must be left to conjecture, but it was evident, from the expression on the respective features of Messrs. Wideo and Bottles, that they had drawn their own conclusions.

"Well!" exclaimed the dairyman, after drawing a hand over his face, as if to hide, smooth, or burnish down any marks or wrinkles which might have aroused the suspicions of Mr. Soppy that his host was not quite so serious as the occasion demanded. "Well," repeated he, "all I can say is, Tom Soppy, that so long as you can make yourself comfortable here, so long I hope you

will stop. There's no likelihood, at least, of your being frightened out of your wits' end by seeing a ghost in Bromley Marsh."

"In the buzzim of this happy family," remarked Billy Bottles, "you must forget your Martha."

"I will," responded Mr. Soppy, and he tried to steady his voice as he spoke; but some tender emotion seemed to rise and almost choke him.

## CHAPTER XV.

"I AM constrained to think, Aubrey," observed Colonel Leferne to his son, in a languid voice, as he stood leaning heavily upon his cane in close proximity to the irregular bed of daffodils, now in full bloom, "that the time has almost arrived for your decision as to the future. At the end of next term you will leave Eton, and although disposed not long since to adopt the family motto in all its integrity, and 'live with will unfettered,' I am not without hope that you will see the expediency of checking this rather objectionable, if not lawless desire, and comply with the civilized restraint which the rules of modern society

impose upon gentlemen. What says our sister here?"

Aunt Margaret had at this moment her hands crossed upon his shoulder nearest to her side, and was looking lovingly in his face.

"That which his heart would say if it could speak," replied she; "for he was always obedient."

"Nothing can be more admirable in the young and, consequently, inexperienced," rejoined the colonel, "than perfect submission. The Lefernes," continued he, "have not been remarkable for the possession of this virtue, and I am, therefore, both pleased and surprised to learn that it is to be found in my son."

"My aunt, sir," returned Aubrey, with a slight laugh, "always wishes me to be thought better than I am."

"It is not the way of the world, Aubrey, as you will find," added his father, cynically.

“But come,” continued he, “how think you of employing or killing time—which is about one and the same thing—upon leaving Eton?”

“I have no wish to leave here,” was the measured and deliberately-spoken reply.

The eyes of the father and son met, and for a few brief seconds were fixed in a blinkless gaze upon each other.

“I begin to fear,” said the colonel, in a tone of raillyery, and turning to his sister, “that we shall not find the full measure of obedience which we were led to expect. Am I to understand, then,” continued he, “that your intentions are to vegetate here?”

“With your consent——”

“That sounds better,” interrupted the colonel. “I now hope that obedience is in the ascendant. Pray finish.”

“I was going to add,” resumed his son, “that with your consent, which I repeat——”

"Accept my best thanks for the exertion," again interrupted the colonel. "Repetition is generally irksome."

"I'll continue here," resumed Aubrey, "for a time, at least, in idleness, and reflect before taking a step of so much importance to myself."

"It appears to me, Margaret," replied the colonel, "that prudence is about to be introduced into our family. The dust of the old crusader who planted those daffodils will no longer rest in peace from astonishment."

"We shall both be happy to have my nephew with us, as he proposes," suggested Aunt Margaret. "I feel certain, Edward, that I may answer for you as for myself."

"I share in the pleasure by anticipation," responded the colonel, "and if not greatly mistaken," continued he, "here comes one who will claim the right of possessing an equal division of our rapture."

"Ivy Girling," observed Aunt Margaret, "Aubrey's earliest playmate."

"And probably the latest," replied the colonel, in an under-tone, which, however, was heard by one.

With hurried steps the gamekeeper's daughter approached, and, from the sudden stop and start which she made upon seeing who were at the trysting spot, besides him she had appointed to meet, it would appear that, absorbed with her thoughts, she failed to perceive the error she had committed until too late to correct it. For a moment she hesitated whether to turn and fly, but, with indecision, stood as motionless as a statue.

"Come here, Ivy," said Aunt Margaret, in a soft and gentle voice. "You have nothing to fear."

Thus invited, Ivy waveringly drew forwards with downcast eyes and cheeks flushed with the crimson blood beneath them.

From under his beetling brows Colonel Leferne measured with criticising look the gamekeeper's daughter, and, as a man of refined taste, was compelled to admit, albeit in silence to himself, that he had never seen a prettier rustic girl, or one more simply dressed to set off natural attractions to advantage.

"Where were you going so hurriedly?" inquired Aunt Margaret, as Ivy stood with heaving bosom before her, after dropping a respectful, if not graceful curtsey.

"Not to frighten the birds, I'm sure," said the colonel, with a chuckle.

"It being rather cold, ma'am," replied Ivy, evincing some confusion in tone and manner, "I was walking fast."

"Nothing could be more natural," rejoined Colonel Leferne. "Walking fast circulates the blood; but there are times and seasons when it moves quickly enough without exertion. The question, however, I think, remains unanswered."

"I certainly asked where were you going, Ivy?" repeated Aunt Margaret.

Ivy Girling glanced furtively at Aubrey Leferne, but remained silent.

"She was coming here," replied he, with a defiant look and gesture, "and at my request."

As the words were spoken Ivy receded a step or two, and, from the expression of her features, looked as if suffering pain from an unseen cause.

"Had you informed me or your aunt of this little innocent appointment," rejoined the colonel, with his eyes twinkling with mirth, "we should have taken care not to have been present. I cannot conceive," continued he, "anything more thoughtless on your part, Aubrey, in the shape of an injustice to yourself."

Aubrey Leferne winced at the delivery of this pointed speech, and glanced angrily around, but said nothing in reply.

"They often met here when little children," remarked Aunt Margaret, as if feeling that some excuse was necessary for her nephew's declaration.

"Indeed!" slowly drawled the colonel. "Then their habits of infancy seem to have been maintained to years of maturer growth. You know what I think about dolls, Aubrey?"

"Dolls!" repeated Aunt Margaret, looking with amazement at her brother.

"Ay," responded the colonel; "but the subject is exhausted. The ruin of the Lefernes has been dolls. Sir Harold," continued he, pointing with the end of his cane to the bed of flowers now in full bloom, and waving their heads jauntily in the cold, nipping breeze of the early year, "has more to answer for than he's aware of in the long slumber of ages. That Sir Knight of the olden time set an evil example with his motto to 'Live with will unfettered,'

which, I fear, has met with a too liberal construction on the part of his descendants."

"Your words to me, Edward," observed Aunt Margaret, "are devoid of meaning."

"Are they?" said the colonel, laughing; but the external effect was scarcely perceptible. "Give me your arm," continued he, turning to his sister, "and let us stroll on at the snail's pace at which I can now only move."

"Will you accompany us, Aubrey?" asked Aunt Margaret.

"No," replied her nephew, with the same defiant look and gesture; "I have an engagement here."

"For what purpose?" inquired Aunt Margaret, as the colonel, resting upon her proffered arm, slowly moved away.

"To practise the game of dolls," rejoined the colonel, turning his head in the direction of his son, "if the truth were confessed. But come," continued he, "let us

not be exacting. We will leave the players to themselves."

With eyes fixed on the retreating figures of the colonel and Aunt Margaret, Ivy and Aubrey Leferne stood, as they had done in years before, at the old trysting spot, with no witnesses by but the daffodils.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE meeting had been protracted, and was not yet closed between Jeremiah Early and his client.

"At the present moment, Colonel," said the lawyer and hard-headed man of business, "I only ask for payment on account of interest due on the last loan."

"Raised, among other things," returned the colonel, throwing himself back in his seat with a yawn, "upon the very chair on which I sit. I protested, as you will remember, Early, against the chair being included in the security, but I suppose that the objection was over-ruled. Is it mine or yours?"

Jeremiah Early had not come there to waste his time in idle discussion, and said so. He was there to be settled with.

It was a light tune which the colonel commenced playing on the library-table, so light that it was scarcely audible; but the air—particularly the variations—seemed to grate harshly on the ear of Jeremiah Early, and his low, contracted brow lowered still more with malice aforethought.

“Through this horse of yours,” said he, “it is well known that you possess money.”

“I am not labouring under the imputation, I hope,” replied the colonel, blandly, “of having thrown any misty doubt upon the fact.”

“Pay me,” rejoined the lawyer.

“That really sounds, Early,” returned Colonel Leferne, “like ‘stand and deliver.’”

“I demand payment,” added Jeremiah, angrily.

“If the demand is to be repeated, sir,”

said the colonel, “I must impose the condition of its being expressed more temperately.”

“Give me my money,” responded Jeremiah, his fears beginning to be awakened from the sudden change in the colonel’s manner, “and let me go.”

“There’s nothing whatever, as far as I understand, to prevent your going—certainly nothing on my part,” added the colonel. “My present opinion, however, is that your departure will not be accompanied with what you facetiously call your money; but which happens to be in my possession.”

The lawyer was about making a hasty, inconsiderate reply; but he saw two fingers raised, and felt instinctively what that signal meant.

“Your patience, Early,” said the colonel, “I will not tax it long.”

A short pause ensued. The colonel cleared his voice, drew the tips of his fingers

delicately across his lips, lounged backwards in his easy-chair, half closed his eyes with a sleepy expression, but fixed them, nevertheless, on Jeremiah Early's unprepossessing features, and then began to carry out his voluntary promise of being brief.

“The money which I have won, and been paid, Early, over the race won by my horse, so strangely mine, may be compared with the last few drops of blood still circulating in a fainting man’s veins. With what I have I may, and sometimes confidently think I shall, get back all my losses ; but if you, Early, were to diminish the cause you would lessen the chance. Do you see the force of my argument ?”

“I would rather see——”

“The money,” interrupted the colonel, “which is an additional proof, if one were necessary, of your limited powers of sight. Extreme selfishness invariably contracts our vision.”

"My unsecured claim upon you, Colonel Leferne," replied Jeremiah Early, sullenly, "is very large, and I wish it reduced."

"If you were ridiculous enough to say otherwise," rejoined the colonel, "I should not pay you the compliment of placing the slightest belief in the statement."

"I have the power of enforcing my security," returned the lawyer, with no improvement in his tone.

"What, over my chairs, the pots and pans, and portraits of my ancestors?" added the colonel, with a chuckle. "I wonder, now," continued he, "what that old curmudgeon there would bring at the hammer? He was eminent for living with will unfettered."

"You treat this subject very lightly, sir," remarked Jeremiah, with increasing ill-humour; "but I was never more serious."

"So you look," responded the colonel, "and forgive me for saying that the emo-

tion in no way improves the expression."

"Have you no proposal to make?" asked the lawyer.

"None whatever," was the reply. "Have you?"

"Yes," quickly answered Jeremiah Early, and his thin lips were compressed as he spoke, while his hands twitched together nervously, as if the resolution to speak was not unmixed with dread.

"You will find me a most willing listener," rejoined the colonel, throwing his head further back, and looking down his nose with a sleepy, patronising mien at the lawyer, whom he saw at a glance was terribly ill at ease. "Pray proceed."

It was easier, however, to give directions than to commence carrying them out. So, at least, it would appear from Jeremiah's hesitation to begin.

"I know little of racing," at length said he, "beyond the knowledge that more

money seems to be lost by gentlemen than won by it."

"Nothing can be more singularly correct than the clearness of your perception," remarked Colonel Leferne, striking three or or four vigorous rub-a-dubs on the table. "You quite surprise me, Early, with the grasp you possess of the subject."

"I also have learnt," resumed the lawyer, "that there is little difficulty in winning when a certainty is insured."

"It's my decided opinion," replied the colonel, "that you must have been, Early, a member of the Ring for the last decade. What remarkable proficiency you've attained!"

"And that the only way to win," continued Jeremiah, speaking with great deliberation, and glancing askance at the colonel, "without the possibility of risk, is to make a horse safe to lose when he's expected to win."

"It has been done, no doubt, and that which has been, Early," returned the colonel, "is sure to recur at some interval fixed by Fate but unknown to us. History repeats itself."

"Then the means of escape from your present difficulties," added the lawyer, "are in your own hands."

"How so?" asked the colonel, with a change so quick and sudden in his manner that it seemed to electrify Jeremiah Early.

It was impossible to disguise it even from himself. The lawyer both looked and felt as if treading on a quicksand.

"How so?" fiercely repeated the colonel, as his features became deeply lined and contracted with anger. "Do you dare to intimate to me a scheme for cheating?"

Jeremiah's inclination was to get nearer the door previous to uttering another syllable and retained his seat with difficulty, while he watched his client's movements

with evident dread of anticipated consequences.

“Knowing me, however, as you do,” continued the colonel, suddenly regaining much of his usual softness of tone and mildness of manner, “I must suppose that I was mistaken. The Lefernes have much to answer for without a doubt; but the portrait of a black-leg—a common, low, cheat—is not to be found as yet in the family picture gallery, and I’m strong in the faith that it never will.”

“It is knowing you as I do,” replied the lawyer, with evident trepidation, “and the desperate state of your finances, that emboldens me to speak. May I do so without reserve, or shall I leave without uttering another syllable?”

“Say what you please,” rejoined the colonel, settling himself in his chair, and waving a hand backward as he spoke, “I’ll not interrupt you again. We must swallow our

full share of bitters in some shape or other, and I'll take my present dose at your hands, Early, in silence. Say what you please."

" You were ready to quarrel with me just now," said Jeremiah, as if having met with a recent injury which had not been compensated for, " and felt that my words stung ye, because the means I would employ to make you rich, compared with what you are, deeply wound your high sense of honour"—he paused, and added, with great significance, " concerning the Turf."

" And of all things," proudly answered the colonel, " above and below it."

" Indeed," returned Jeremiah, conveying as direct a negative as was ever expressed to a proposition.

A flush of risen anger spread itself rapidly over the colonel's features from brow to chin ; but he made no observation in reply.

" What can be said of your marriage settlement? Did you, Colonel Leferne,

display a high sense of honour when that trick was played?"

The colonel's hands clutched convulsively both arms of the easy chair as he bent suddenly forward, and looked ready to spring at the lawyer's throat.

"Trick!" he exclaimed, between his clenched teeth.

"Your instructions just now," continued Jeremiah Early, sideling instinctively on his seat towards the door, "were that I was to say what I please. Shall I stop or go on?"

The colonel, with a long-drawn breath, which sounded like a stifled sob, let his hands fall from the arms of the easy chair, and, sinking gently backwards, replied in a hoarse whisper, "Go on."

"Is your plan then," resumed the lawyer, "for disentailing the estate at the moment —ay, the very moment—of your son becoming legally entitled to his inheritance,

one to be applauded for its high sense of honour?"

If a look could have struck Jeremiah Early dead, he would then and there have been lifeless.

Perhaps it was lost upon him, for he continued his address without apparent sense of danger.

"What shall be said of your sister's squandered fortune?"

"It was not much, Early," expostulated the colonel. "It was not much," repeated he.

"More could not be taken," rejoined the lawyer, "for it was all she had."

"Difficulties surrounded and hedged me in, Early," returned the colonel. "I was compelled to take it."

"The position being caused by your own selfish indulgences," added Jeremiah Early, "and your own insane love for ostentatious display."

For the first time in his life Colonel Leferne was listening to the truth concerning himself, and, to his consternation, felt silenced by it.

"Your fortune spent and wasted to the last farthing," resumed the lawyer, "friends impoverished, and a debtor still, and yet you would have the world believe that you are governed by a high sense of honour!"

"I shall pay all, Early," murmured the colonel, in a half articulate voice. "I shall pay all."

"How?" returned Jeremiah, and the monosyllable seemed to come from his lips with a snap.

"That which has been, Early," responded the colonel, "may be again—from my winnings. Fortune," continued he, with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks, "has favoured me, and she will again. I can trust her."

"But *I* can't," returned the lawyer,

"and, what is more to the purpose, will not. I never yet, Colonel Leferne," continued he, "allowed anything to rest on a chance which might be reduced to a certainty."

"Explain your meaning in detail," said the colonel, with his chin upon his breast, and presenting altogether a drooping appearance.

"I have done so already," added Jeremiah, now beginning to look the triumphant master of the situation. "Give me a written permission to put a pen through the name of your horse," continued he, "when I think proper, and I'll secure you more money than you will ever live to waste."

"And if I refuse this discretionary order?" asked the colonel, with closed eyelids, and in a voice scarcely above an audible whisper.

"Then be either prepared to pay my demand," replied the lawyer, "or take the consequences of not doing so."

"And those are?" interrogatively rejoined the colonel, with a drowsy aspect.

"The immediate sale of everything you possess," replied Jeremiah, "including the very animal you call your own, but which, in fact, does not belong to ye."

"Is this the alternative, Early?" asked the colonel, plaintively.

"Your choice lies between the two," responded Jeremiah. "Accept whichever you please."

"The crowning ambition of my life," rejoined the colonel, "was to win the Derby."

"Your vital interests," returned the lawyer, "are to lose it. Your object of ambition," continued he, "might unexpectedly be frustrated; but the substantial benefit to be derived from the course I suggest admits of no shadow of uncertainty."

"You will afford me time for reflection, Early?" said the colonel, drawing a long sigh.

"As much as you please," replied the lawyer, "so as the opportunity is not sacrificed by delay; but I should prefer having your prompt answer."

"That, at least, I cannot give to-day," rejoined the colonel. "The intention, however, is that I shall consent to the withdrawal of my colt from the race at any time you think proper, so that the money for which he has been backed shall be lost."

"The scheme is anything but original," returned Jeremiah, "but one which has always proved profitable when managed with skill."

"He will seem to be supported," added the colonel, "when, through you and your confederates, the horse will be laid against, I sharing in the—what shall we call it, Early?"

"Robbery," responded Jeremiah, "if you see no objection. The term is often used,

and it seems to me appropriate enough in this instance."

"What a couple of cool rascals we must be, Early," rejoined the colonel, re-commencing a soft tune on the arm of the chair, "to call a plan of our own, by which we are to be enriched, a robbery!"

"So long as I get money," added the lawyer, "I care nothing about what is said of my sayings or doings. Money, Colonel Leferne—give me money!"

"It is decidedly useful," said the colonel, reflectively, "and many ways of procuring it are not too nice or particular. Now, I should say," continued he, with a slight laugh, "that this scheme of ours cannot be called nice."

"We need not discuss that point," replied Jeremiah. "Give me your written consent to put the pen through the name of your colt when I please for the Derby, and leave the rest to me."

"Have I no choice," rejoined the colonel, "between this and the immediate transfer of the chair in which I sit, to say nothing of the pots, and the pans, and the portraits—to somebody else?"

"You have my decision," added the lawyer. "The bill of sale will be enforced at once if you are mad enough, Colonel Leferne, to let this great opportunity be lost."

"It would be such a personal inconvenience to part with the chair, Early," said the colonel, "that I hope it will plead in justification of my becoming as great a scoundrel as yourself. You shall have the order to scratch the Unknown."

An exulting laugh broke from the lawyer's lips.

"Now, Colonel Leferne—now?" said he.

"The present," responded the colonel, "is as fitting, perhaps, for the dirty act as the future. Give me a pen."

Upon Jeremiah Early quitting the pres-

ence of his client, he took with him the coveted document which would erase from among the Derby candidates the bay colt, sire unknown, dam Queen Mary, by Gauntlet, by Bright Steel, by Helmet Plume.

## CHAPTER XVII.

NOTHING was to be seen of the daffodils ; for, early summer being near, they were taking a long rest after a dance in the cold, rough wind, which pipes before the coming of spring. Under the ground, without a withered stem to mark their whereabouts, the daffodils slept. The hand which planted them, as tradition said, had long since crumbled into dust ; but when the seasons came round there were the daffodils as fresh and young as ever. Sir Harold Leferne's monument had faded with the lapse of ages ; but the daffodils raised a perpetual one for themselves of fresh golden

flowers, which seemed to mock that noble work in marble, as black as night.

Beneath the wide-spreading branches of a chestnut-tree in Greatwood Park Queen Mary stood reflecting on the past, its vicissitudes, phases, and dearly-bought lessons. With outstretched head and drowsy eyes the old mare remained, resting one of her hind legs on the toe of her foot, and gently switching her flanks with the point of her fine silky tail, grown long from persistent neglect of the scissors. The action of the tail, be it known, was not to drive the flies away, for although the day was warm, and the sun's rays streamed through the thick foliage of the chestnut-tree, so as to render the shade a cool and pleasant retreat, those disturbers to the peace and comfort of Queen Mary during her summer's enjoyment at grass were not as yet on the wing. Queen Mary was a-thinking, and she lazily switched her flanks with the point of her

tail to assist her thoughts by way of a gentle stimulant.

Gauntlet's daughter, in turning over the leaves of the past, seemed to think that the cry of a mother might meet with recognition, and giving a slight neigh, as if made in a dream, she threw one ear backwards as if to catch a distant whinny in reply, while the other was kept pointed to the front, for any that might come from that direction of the compass.

"What does thee want, lass?" said a cheery voice, and, upon the old mare arching her neck on one side to glance at the questioner, she saw the burly figure of Harry Girling, the gamekeeper, approaching the spot where she stood. "What does thee want, lass?" repeated he.

Queen Mary turned leisurely as he spoke, and, meeting him by full half way of the distance separating them, placed her soft, velvety nose between his broad, rough

palms, and invited it silently to be rubbed.

"I shouldn't wonder, now," continued he, chafing away at her majesty's nose with mingled energy and tenderness, "that you're a-thinking about that colt o' yours. Mothers are more likely to do so, perhaps, than fathers, when their loved ones are away; but I *do* think," said Harry, with emphasis, and pursuing his task with marked industry, "that if my Ivy was not always at home, my heart would be always abroad. But these secrets we keep to ourselves, lass," continued he. "Because, if our loved ones only knew, sometimes, how much we loved 'em, they'd take liberties, ye know, and get both parties into trouble."

Queen Mary, either tickled by the remark, or Harry's fingers, brought her teeth together with a playful snap, which threatened violence without carrying it into execution.

"Come, come," expostulated Harry,

"you're not a man-eater, as some o' your race ha' been ; but that was on the side o' the sires and not the dams. Helmet Plume, I think it was," continued he, "that made a meal of his boy, and, as Bottles says, the poor oss didn't recover his sickness for a week, and had to be fed on bran mashes and gruel."

The old mare, at this juncture, raised her nose from between Harry's palms, and, lifting her head aloft, stood with her ears pricked, and her large, full eyes opened wide, like those of a startled gazelle.

"What doth see, lass ?" asked Harry, throwing a keen, strong look in the same direction ; but, perceiving nothing to attract his attention in particular, resumed his address to his solitary hearer.

"That boy," continued Harry, who liked perhaps to hear himself speak from the few opportunities presenting themselves for his so doing, "being digested, as Bottles says,

was never buried in consecrated ground ; but a stone was erected to mark the spot where he fell."

Standing motionless as a statue, the green sward forming the plinth at her feet, Queen Mary remained with a fixed stare gazing in the distance.

"I don't see what you're looking there for," observed the gamekeeper, again directing his eyes in the same direction ; "but there's no accounting for many o' your strange ways. It may be that, old gal-like, you think you look handsome when stretching out your legs, and looking more like an image than flesh and bones. You were a beauty, no doubt, and you look now a bit o' quality ; but old gals should always recollect," said Harry, with a sage nod of the head, "that stretching out their legs don't suit 'em."

Gauntlet's daughter paid no attention to the criticism bestowed upon her attitude,

but remained, as before, with an intent look concentrated at a certain point.

"It isn't often that we see anything particularly strange in these parts—at least by daylight," said Harry, correcting himself, "and I don't discover exactly what the focus is."

Queen Mary stood motionless, and might, for any effect to the contrary, have been carved from granite.

"Here we are," soliloquised the game-keeper, "with the rooks to caw at us, and the wood-pigeons to coo at us; but beyond these companions—as Ivy says sometimes—there isn't much to make life cheerful."

The old mare continued as frigid as stone itself.

"It's a lonesome place," continued Harry Girling, "for a young heart, and I often think my little one must feel buried afore her time."

At this moment, and in the direction of

Queen Mary's gaze, two figures were seen to emerge from the shade and shadow of a cluster of fir-trees in the distance.

"Why, your eyesight's better than mine," observed Harry. "Who have we here?"

Shading his eyes with a hand raised above them, the gamekeeper stood watching the movements of the two figures.

"One," remarked he, keeping his hand in the same position, "is my lady, sure enough, and the other—" stopping short, he added nothing more, but, with features turning gradually pale, stared in mute silence between astonishment and dread.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

NOTHING could be more favourable than the reports concerning the Unknown. Newmarket to a man, to say nothing of little Mite, who was accredited to be the smallest lad who ever wore a gaiter within its precincts, felt, and said, and circulated in prose, and sometimes poetry, that “there was one, and one only, in the Derby.” The parrot at the “Greyhound” had become profane, and swore, by the highest authority, in addition to the hitherto mild assertion, that “the colonel would win the Derby.” Not the ghost of a peg appeared to hang a doubt upon. Public form proved that the Newmarket idol, The

Crack, was at least from seven to ten pounds superior to anything he would have to meet. There was a dark lot, to be sure, but, as far as human foresight could draw a conclusion, there was little, if anything, to be feared from "the dark lot."

The *Sporting Press* reminded its readers that the owner of the Unknown—a once princely patron of the Turf—had always gone straight, and that he was so far above suspicion that nothing earthly could measure the intervening space. It also called attention to the assuring fact that the colt was in the Heather House stable, and that his trainer expressed himself as never feeling greater confidence in a result which might be regarded only as a matter of health—barring accident. "The Demon," it was confidently announced, had been retained to ride the favourite, and then the pertinent question followed, "What more could be required?"

Jeremiah Early, perhaps, might have given a reply without much difficulty.

During Johnny Tadpole's leave of absence, on a visit to Bromley Marsh, subsequent to the Unknown's victory in the Criterion, his friend and companion, Mite, was specially appointed to fill his now distinguished position of attendant on the Unknown. Mite, like his bosom friend and associate, "Taddy," knew the full weight of a responsibility, and, being only a small pinch of humanity, felt the force of the handicap axiom that "the race is in the scales." It was agreed—tacitly agreed—that Mite was to have half of Taddy's plum-pudding for four distinct and separate consecutive Sundays, after his return to the Heather House establishment, by way of compensation for extra services, in a friendly point of view, and the agreement being kept with honourable impartiality on both sides—Mite, although pressed, declining to

take more than a full half—the two parties to the contract were on the very best terms with each other.

Mite was very small, as the name by which he was best known implied, and “five-stun-three” looked a giant by the side of “three-stun-five,” albeit no advantage had been taken of the difference in the specific gravity when their opinions did not exactly coincide on social matters, setting, therefore, a bright example to people of heavier weight.

Mite, it must be repeated, was very small, and barely drew the beam towards him, in heavy marching order, at the weight before mentioned. Boots, breeches, and buttons, with the assistance of a shirt of microscopic proportions, scarcely turned the scale at “three-stun-five;” but Mite’s merits and moral worth were not to be weighed in this fashion. He had the confidence of his master as being one of those “good

boys" that would not play "the monkey." Mite abjured tricks, and was as grave and almost as dignified as a bishop in all that he said and did, with the eyes and ears of the world ready to bear testimony concerning his errors and frailties. He felt, through the ordinary agency of ways and means, that he was regarded as a great example, and with commendable pride Mite determined that the character should be supported in all its integrity. "Head, heels, and hands" were the rare qualities conceded to be in his possession, and history had made him acquainted with the pleasant reminiscence that men's fortunes had been made through these mediums. It was, therefore, nothing but a natural conclusion—spiced with vanity, perhaps—that Mite should, when his countenance was reflected in a mirror—two inches by four—as he arranged his cravat with scrupulous care, look upon himself with a generous measure of personal satis-

faction, known only to himself in its full and minute particulars.

With a face ruddy and round, and about the size of an orange of fair dimensions, Mite looked blessed with health and contentment, and, if his frame was bony and bare, it evinced no effects of being kept down through a systematic cause of self-denial approaching the extreme point of starvation. Mite was a feather weight from a design by nature, not sketched by art. Had his eyes been otherwise than clear, and as blue as the sky above him sometimes is in the finest summer weather, they would scarcely have been the right colour in the right place for a really “good boy;” but, being ethereal blue, no question of dispute could arise on this point. Not having been consulted in the choice of a nose, he was of course above the reach of censure for possessing one totally devoid of a bridge, and which, when described without reservation,

is commonly called a pug. Little need be stated respecting his mouth. Like giants of the past, and over-grown forked animals of the present, Mite found his mouth useful, and, as his incisors and molars were as sound as unblemished ivory, he did not neglect to apply them, at all convenient opportunities, to the general and particular purposes for which they were constructed with such admirable skill.

Nothing could exceed the miniature work in detail of Mite's costume, when dressed all in his best and going to church on Sunday. As a "good boy," he might have gone, perhaps, on special days in the week —saints days, for instance,—but, being an apprentice, he was not absolutely master of his own time, and the saints had to be neglected. A couple of small shirt-collars, rounded at the points like blinkers, indented the sides of his cheeks, and produced a fulness of effect above them from pressure

commonly called squeezing. The cravat, always of a showy colour and fine silky texture, was tied with a skill which gave rise to feelings of envy in more stable-boys' breasts in Newmarket than can be enumerated, although the neck it encompassed was not much bigger than that of a sparrow. Square was the bow, and mathematically even the ends, while the centre held a pin in the shape of a gold horse-shoe, rather too large, perhaps, for the exact nicety of proportions; but still, as a pin in the shape of a horse-shoe, there it was, a conspicuous object upon which the eyes of Newmarket were frequently concentrated. Having a natural affection for drab breeches, and gaiters of the newest and neatest cut, strongly linked to a passion for pearl buttons, Mite was the very head and front of fashion in a large circle of small boys in and around "the metropolis of the Turf," and, being imitated closely, was conse-

quently flattered. Having next to nothing to hide, Mite wore a long-waisted jacket which looked, to a keen observer, all waist and nothing beyond, besides two outside pockets in which his hands were thrust, as a rule, when unemployed, and not as an exception. A hat of the chimney-pot construction, round as a shield of the old type, and jauntily tipped on one side of his closely-cropped head, and there stood Mite dressed all his best as he went to church on Sunday.

Now it so happened that the toilets of Johnny Tadpole and Mite being complete, and, it is needless to add, perfect, they were wending their way one Sunday, like "good boys," to church, and, although it is fair to conjecture that their thoughts were generally bent upon serious subjects, there is no refuting the fact that worldly ones would now and then rise to the surface to disturb the tenor of their reflections.

"I mean to go at it strong to-day, Taddy," observed Mite, sauntering by the side of his companion with both hands thrust into the pockets of his jacket. "I mean to go at it strong to-day," repeated he. "If faith will do it, it will be as good as over."

"What do you mean?" inquired Johnny Tadpole, evidently bewildered at the remark which, for anything that preceded it, seemed to have no foundation.

"I mean this," replied Mite, withdrawing a hand from one of the pockets of his jacket, and thrusting it straight from the shoulder as if to convey emphasis with the expression—"I mean this," said he. "What the parson tells us is either true or it isn't-quite-so-much-so-as-it-ought-to-be. Now, if it's true, I've only to throw all my weight into the scale to make what our prophet the parrot says as right as an eight-day clock."

"I don't quite see it," replied Johnny Tadpole, dreamingly.

Mite replaced his hand in the pocket of his jacket, and continued.

"Parson says," resumed he, "nothing beats faith. We have only to believe in getting what we want, or doing what we wish, and the thing's as good as over. Now, if this is the right tip, Taddy," said Mite, "one of the Unknown's plates will be nailed on the door of his box as the winner of the Derby."

"Why so?" asked his companion.

"Because of my going in strong for it to-day," rejoined Mite. "I shall pin my faith to the prophecy of the parrot, with a loud amen for the finish."

"But our parson didn't mean to speak of two-year old engagements, weight for age races, or handicaps," returned Johnny Tadpole, indignant at the supposition.

"Oh, yes, but he did, though!" added Mite. "I heard what he said, more than once, about the race not always being won

by the fastest, which called to my mind what a stayer can do over a scope o' ground."

"I tell ye," added Johnny Tadpole, "it's altogether a mistake. You mustn't think what the parson says in this way, or you'll find yourself, perhaps, in a devilish awkward situation."

"Let my situation," returned Mite, "be what it may, head lad or not, I shall stick to faith in the prophecy of the parrot."

"The time's pretty near at hand," remarked Johnny Tadpole, "when we shall know all about it."

"Ha!" gasped Mite, "the Unknown's being wound up for his great engagement next month, and you ride him in his exercise gallops, Taddy. I wonder you've not grown proud."

"To look after such a race-'oss," responded his companion, "is enough, perhaps, to make one feel a little starchy."

"It is, indeed," rejoined Mite; "but you're just the same quiet, good-tempered cove, Taddy, as when you came here from milking the cows in Bromley Marsh."

"There hasn't been time for much change since then," returned Johnny, laughing.

"More than two whole years," added Mite, "and a good deal can be done in less time than that for better or worse."

"Our colt's made a wonderful change in what people think of him since then," observed Johnny Tadpole.

"He has indeed," replied Mite, with profound admiration at the thought promoted by his companion's remark. "He has indeed," repeated he. "We looked upon him, ye know, when he first came to our stable, in the light of a duffer, and you, Taddy, were called '*Milk Be-low.*'"

"So I was!" ejaculated Johnny Tadpole, "and it was a name that rayther pleased me than not. I shall feel obliged, Mite, by

your calling me Milk *Be-low* for the rest of this day."

"Why?" briefly inquired Mite, obviously surprised at the request.

"Because feeling a little starchy now and then," responded Johnny, in a serious tone, accompanied by the sedate manner of a "good boy" going to church on Sunday, "it may cause me to think what I was, and thereby render me thankful for what I am."

"My sentiments all over!" returned Mite. "There's nothing like sentiments such as them. I often feel 'em," continued he, pressing a hand upon what he probably meant his breast, but which, in a strictly anatomical point of view, was rather too low down, "a-rumbling and a-jumbling here, but haven't the flow o' the tongue to let 'em out, Taddy. You have."

Johnny Tadpole smiled like one having deserved a well-merited compliment, and been promptly paid. For, with happy re-

collections of the pains taken in his education by Samuel Wideo, he held a favourable but silent opinion of his own intellectual capacities, and, if pleased, was not surprised at their occasionally meeting with acknowledgment.

The two "good boys" were now within the precincts of turf-covered and daisy-speckled mounds, beneath which some "good boys" slept forgotten, but not unknown to fame, and they said no more.

## CHAPTER XIX.

**A**S may readily be conjectured, there are places of honour in the Heather House stable, and among them a “box” of great distinction, wherein the reigning favourite has his daily toilet performed, eats, drinks, sleeps, and receives the privileged few admitted by special introduction to his august presence.

This “box,” it is almost needless to add, was now tenanted by the Unknown. On the door was nailed a plate worn by a whilom successful candidate for Derby honours, and although his name and the date of the triumph were recorded in letters of gold in

the centre, time and the seasons had obliterated both.

Johnny Tadpole and the Unknown were alone in the "box," as they had often been before, and no one—not even the head lad—was close at hand to interrupt their privacy. It was obvious, however, that "company" was expected, for the "box" had been set in that order which may fitly be described as apple-pie. Not a single straw was out of place, but each distinct and particular one looked to have been combed into the place it occupied. In speckless clothes the Unknown stood racked up above his crib, and placed upon a white damask napkin on the off-side of his off-heel, spread with dainty care, were rubber, comb, and brush, the respective articles of his toilet.

Johnny's undress, as he stood with folded arms silently contemplating the scene before and behind him with great satisfaction, was nothing more nor less than a sham. He

had evidently studied the effect of that undress as much as the full costume worn on state occasions or when going to church on Sunday. The unfastened garter had been permitted, if not coaxed, to slip down in creases so as to display the spot where a calf might be partly visible some day, if the fond hopes concerning his legs were doomed to be realized. His unbraced and slackened breeches drooped, but not by accident, and his shirt fell in graceful folds over the waistband, in conformity with the strict rules of the fine arts. Even the careless-looking turned-down collar was evidently arranged with study, and from head to heel Johnny Tadpole looked the personification of pre-meditated carelessness.

"They'll be here presently," muttered he to himself, "and I'm ready for 'em."

The words were scarcely spoken, when the sound of feet was heard approaching, and immediately afterwards the latch of the

door was lifted with a clink, and Mark Rookson entered, accompanied by Colonel Leferne and Jeremiah Early.

As soon as the sharp click of the latch fell upon Johnny's tympanum, and before a single eye could bear witness to the nimble act, he was standing at the head of the Unknown, rubber in hand, ready to strip off his speckless clothes, or obey any order with alacrity which might be given him. That order was conveyed by a silent motion of one of Mark Rookson's hands, and, as if with the touch of a harlequin's wand, there stood Queen Mary's son in all his natural and unhidden beauty. No additional polish to his coat appeared either possible or desirable, for satin itself could not be brighter, but, as soon as the clothes were deposited on the floor of the "box," his attendant, with unsurpassable agility, commenced to rub down the Unknown with a "Ss-ch-ws-ch," which seems an indispensable accompani-

ment to grooming, whether in the higher or lower grades of the profession.

"How do you think he looks, Colonel?" inquired Mark Rookson, after allowing a few seconds for Colonel Leferne's keen look to measure his colt, inch by inch, from head to heel.

"All that I could wish him," replied the colonel, "with nearly a month intervening before the race."

"He will be some pounds lighter," rejoined the trainer, cheerily, "and fit to run for a—"

"Man's life," added the colonel. "Is that what you would have said?"

"Well, sir," returned Mark Rookson, laughing, "I've heard that offered to be staked before now; but never knew its being run for."

"*I* have," said the colonel, "and no one can have an idea of the interest in the finish excepting him staking his life, par-

ticularly if it's a shave on the post by a short head."

"Egad!" exclaimed Jeremiah Early, "my bones rattle in my skin at the bare thought!"

"Do they?" rejoined the colonel, throwing his head back and looking at the lawyer with half-closed, sleepy eyes, while a sneer looped up the angles of his mouth. "A man," continued he, "can die but once, Early."

The subject, perhaps, was not an agreeable one to the lawyer, for he said nothing in reply, but stood watching Johnny Tadpole vigorously rubbing down the Unknown, with his spluttering "Ts-ch-ws-ch," in silence.

"This fellow, Colonel," observed Mark Rookson, "if he goes on as he is going, will about win the Derby."

"Will he?" responded the colonel, abstractedly.

"I never felt greater confidence in any

colt that I have trained," rejoined Mark Rookson. "From the moment I knew the stuff that he was made of there has not been the interruption of a single day to his training."

"He's a star of the first magnitude!" observed the colonel, surveying the Unknown with an admiration, perhaps, felt only by himself.

"In public as in private," returned Mark Rookson, "he has never deceived me; but always ran generously to his true form."

"You hear that, Early?" observed Colonel Leferne, interrogatively.

Jeremiah gave no direct answer; but with a look bent under his knitted brows turned to the trainer, and said,

"He will be a great favourite with the public, I suppose, before the day of the race."

"No hotter one will ever have started for the Derby, sir," replied Mark Rookson,

with unreserved confidence in his tone and manner.

"But remembering the unforeseen circumstances which arise," rejoined the lawyer, "I'm astonished that the multitude should be sanguine in supporting a single horse, among many, to win a great race."

"The public sometimes suffers with the owners," returned the trainer, "from causes which can't be controlled. Horses, like ourselves, are capable of doing to-day that which they are incapable of accomplishing to-morrow, and in and out running might often be found a matter of health. At the same time," continued he, "barring accidents, it is generally pretty well known where confidence may be placed."

"The owner comes in for his share of the responsibility," remarked the colonel.

"And the trainer and jockey for theirs," added Mark Rookson, laughing. "When the event comes off right nothing can be

more agreeable to each and all interested. When it comes off wrong—well, then it's not so pleasant, and ugly words are sometimes applied to express ugly thoughts."

"But we can't shut our eyes to the historical fact, I fear," observed Colonel Leferne, "that robberies of the most bare-faced description are encouraged in connection with the Turf, eh, Early?"

"Are they?" inquired the lawyer; but it was scarcely a question.

"You must, I suppose," resumed the colonel, "have heard of poisoning horses?"

Jeremiah Early admitted that his attention had been once engaged in a trial in which a man was found guilty of poisoning horses, and subsequently hanged for the offence.

"A most exemplary punishment!" exclaimed the colonel. "I would have every scoundrel hanged for a much less crime. It would rid the world expeditiously and

economically of many baneful influences—eh, Early?"

The lawyer made a visible effort to look indifferent, and, if a slight shock to the nervous system was felt, it was scarcely perceptible.

"And you cannot be ignorant, I imagine," resumed the colonel, as if determined to persevere with the subject under discussion, "that horses have been purposely lamed, pulled, and scratched."

"I may, and believe, have heard of something of the kind," replied Jeremiah Early, "but no child, Mr. Rookson," continued he, addressing the trainer, "can know less of racing matters than I do."

"There are rogues to be met everywhere, sir," responded Mark Rookson; "but, considering the opportunities which men have—and often needy ones too—of putting money in their pockets at the expense of the owners of racehorses, it may be looked upon with pride among a large body of

dependent individuals that seldom a well-founded accusation either is or can be made against their honesty."

"This flattering eulogium, Early," said Colonel Leferne, "does not apply to what are called the workers of a commission. The workers of a commission," repeated he, "are sometimes employed to lay against a horse, and when the last shilling is got out of him that can be squeezed, he is scratched."

"With the usual cry," added Mark Rookson, "that the owner was forestalled in the market. It is a certain method of making money," continued he, "but not a very honest one."

"But still, as you say—certain," returned the lawyer, glancing furtively out of the corners of his eyes.

"Nothing can be more so, for no risk is run," added the trainer. "Fictitious bets are made to lead the public to suppose that

a genuine stable commission is being executed ; the public rush on, thinking to have a fair run for their money, and discover, when too late, that a dead horse, or one not foaled, might as well have been backed !”

“ I perfectly understand,” replied Jeremiah Early, “ as I thought I did. Notwithstanding the conclusive proof,” continued he, “ of the determination to withdraw a horse from the race before the bets are made, they are as *bona fide* as if he started for it.”

“ By my honour, Early,” rejoined the colonel, “ with the confessed knowledge of a child in these matters, you appear to possess the experience of a man associated with the fraternity of sharpers ! Where did you graduate in this code of rascality ?”

The lawyer said nothing, but glanced angrily at the speaker.

“ I begin to suspect, Early,” continued Colonel Leferne, in a bantering tone, which seemed to be habitual to him on most occa-

sions, "that you have the instincts of the spider. Without being specially educated to weave woofs for poor confiding flies, you know how at least to spin the web to catch them from a voluntary gift of nature."

Johnny Tadpole's "Ts-ch-ws-ch" was undiminished in its vigour as the conversation proceeded, and, having to keep all his senses on the defensive for the erratic movements of the Unknown, he probably scarcely heard a syllable that was spoken.

Now the bay colt—sire unknown—made a playful snap with his teeth, which threatened to cut Johnny clean in halves. Then he doubled up a hind leg, and, lashing out, seemed to entertain the innocent design of sending Johnny straight through the wall of his "box" into space, or anywhere that might be handy upon the exhaustion of the propelling force. At one moment, when the rubber seemed to tickle him in a spot too ticklish for endurance, there appeared

a likelihood of Johnny taking the shape of a pancake or muffin; for the Unknown threw the whole weight of his body at an angle so acute that had he fallen, and Johnny been under him as he fell, nothing short of a miracle could have prevented the catastrophe.

"But then," as Mark Rookson observed, "it was all play—nothing but play. He would not hurt the boy."

"Everything, then, connected with the colt appears, at the present time," observed the colonel, "to be as we could desire."

"With one exception," responded the trainer.

"What is that?" nervously asked Jeremiah Early.

"The money for which the horse is backed from time to time," rejoined Mark Rookson, "never lessens the odds in the betting. I don't like that."

"Why?" curtly asked Jeremiah Early.

"It raises a suspicion that there are strings being pulled," replied Mark Rookson, "not by friendly fingers."

"Those fingers," rejoined the colonel, "ought to be scorched to the bone. What do you say, Early?"

"Is there no trace from whence the opposition comes?" inquired the lawyer, taking no notice of the question.

"None whatever," responded the trainer. "It may be the honest conviction on the part of the bookmakers," continued he, "that the Unknown is not good enough to win; but the recent outlays upon him ought not to keep him stationary."

"You hear that, Early?" remarked the colonel. "I shall begin to think that you are the miscreant who have been laying against the colt with the diabolical intention of making him safe."

This facetious remark on the part of Colonel Leferne was intended, of course,

only as a jest; but Jeremiah Early took a different view of the matter, and no one could look more serious above one degree from solemnity.

"In a commercial point of view, then," remarked the lawyer, "the market is not so healthy as it ought to be."

"This colt," replied Mark Rookson, extending the palm of a hand towards Queen Mary's son, who was momentarily threatening to snap Johnny Tadpole in two equal parts, flatten him, or kick him into the adjoining parish—it being, however, nothing but play. "This colt," repeated he, "has only to repeat that which he has lately done to win the Derby. Highly tried in private, with the true weight in the scale, and no allowance made, he answered the question required of him in a manner which renders the race a certainty, if he only keeps well."

"You hear that, Early?" rejoined the

colonel, but the words sounded as if he had become as suddenly grave as the lawyer. “ You hear that, Early ? ” repeated he, “ the hope of my life ! ”

“ Such being the case,” resumed the trainer, “ and the race being so near at hand, I’m surprised that the horse is not now quoted at a shorter price ; but there always appears to be an undercurrent at work.”

“ An undercurrent at work,” echoed Colonel Leferne. “ You hear that, Early ? ”

Hear it or not, the lawyer said nothing in reply ; but, with eyes bent upon the ground, stood as if absorbed in thought.

“ We may feel satisfied, however,” continued Mark Rookson, “ that nothing exists at the present moment to prejudice the great chance of our horse. Well at the post, and he will win.”

It might have been that the cane upon which Colonel Leferne rested somewhat

heavily, with both hands clasped over the handle, slipped as these words were spoken, for he reeled, staggered against the side of the box, and would have fallen but for the ready aid of Mark Rookson.

“Are you unwell?” asked Jeremiah Early, with evident alarm, clutching the colonel by one of his arms.

“Very—very unwell,” gasped the colonel. “Let me get into the air. I can scarcely breathe.”

## CHAPTER XX.

BY arrangement, a special appointment had been made that Jeremiah Early should be at the dairy at Bromley Marsh on a certain evening, and at a certain hour, to meet William Bottles on a certain matter of business. What this “certain matter of business” was had not been expressed or even implied; but William Bottles being a most complete and perfect master of his own time—having generally nothing to do—determined to be punctual in keeping the appointment, buoyed with the hope that something might “turn up” profitable to his interests, and knowing that the opposite, in a pecuniary point of view, was absolutely

impossible; for with the last remarkably social meeting with jacket and gaiters he had shared his last shilling, and not one farthing of change remained as the means of self-indulgence.

“Light come, light go,” was the force which directed the circle in which William Bottles moved, and as it had been, so it was, and was likely to be, world without end, or, at least, so long as he possessed any worldly interest in the world.

The two lonely chairs in the parlour of the dairy were occupied one evening by Samuel Wideo and his compatriot, William Bottles, when the sun was set, and the long, weird shadows cast upon the coarse, sedge-like grass of Bromley Marsh had vanished, to be succeeded by approaching darkness.

The parlour remained just as it had been in the Tadpole days of innocence, and the cow with the iron tail. There was the table on which Johnny had learned to make o’s

as large and in the shape of small birds' eggs, and became proficient in the rudiments of the science of numbers by discovering how many two and two made. There were the ornaments on the wall—the faded Leferne colours, the whip and spurs—as of old, and nothing more.

Feeling, as was natural, ill at ease upon a chair which was never designed to give ease in any position, Samuel Wideo rose, and, separating the tails of his coat, stood with his back to the grate, although no fire was burning therein, and the powers of his imagination must have been excessive for the hypothesis to exist that the slightest warmth could be derived under such chilling circumstances. There, however, Samuel Wideo stood, in an attitude often occupied, with William Bottles as a companion—whether congenial or otherwise was best known to himself.

“I wonder what this artful old nag wants

with me?" remarked Billy. "I do *so*."

"It will soon be no secret," replied Samuel Wideo.

"If it's to put some money in my fob," rejoined William Bottles, "I'm not partickler as to who cuts or shuffles the cards. All I want is to stand in. Now, if this artful old nag has a little winning game in hand, all I shall say to him is let me stand in. I shall *so*."

"I shouldn't be surprised to find that it has something to do with our hoss," observed Samuel Wideo.

"P'raps he wants me to nobble him," responded Billy, with a laugh which sounded loud and long, if not musical, "and so drop the colonel in the hole. Like a good many of my betters," continued he, wiping his eyes with one of the cuffs of his coat, so as to remove the tearful effects of his mirth, "I've been a rascal more from necessity than choice, Sam. I have *so*. But, whatever

hanky-panky games I may have played, I could never play a false one with the Colonel. He's too good a sort. He is *so*."

"A gentleman," returned Samuel Wideo, "always a gentleman."

"And no one's enemy but his own," added William Bottles.

"I don't go quite so far as that," replied the dairyman, reflectively, "knowing one or two individuals who might take a different view o' the subject. Tom Soppy, for instance," continued he, "if here, could tell us that old story of his about the colonel's wife, which is not one of the most pleasant domestic tales I ever heard of."

"Nothing's been heard of that poor lady for years, has there?" inquired Bottles.

"Only, as you've heard from Tom Soppy," replied his companion, "that she must be dead, as her wraith haunts the Hall and the neighbourhood. He says, you know, that he saw it."

"It wouldn't take much to frighten Tom Soppy out of the few wits he's got," rejoined William Bottles; "but I've often wondered what it was he saw in the crimson-room before he was clean pumped out with fear."

"Miss Leferne, the colonel's sister," returned Samuel Wideo—"that's who it was, and what it was he saw; but the old fool had worked himself up to such a pitch that he didn't know his own missis."

"His wife told him so before he left, didn't she?" added William Bottles.

"Yes," responded the dairyman, "and has told him so since he's been back again, I suspect."

"How he snivelled and whimpered to get his feet once more under the still-room table!" added William Bottles. "His fat began to run away ever since he left; but I suppose he begins to pick up a bit now."

"The Colonel received him in a nice and friendly way," observed the dairyman, turn-

ing the palms of his hands backwards towards the grate as if for additional warmth.

“How was that?” briefly inquired William Bottles, curious to learn the particulars of the reception, which the forsaker of the bosom of Dame Soppy met with upon his return to Greatwood Park.

“The Colonel was sitting alone in the library,” began Samuel Wideo, “as Tom Soppy entered the room shaking from head to foot, and, without any inquiry being made as to the state of his health, asked him then and there to repeat what he had told him upon his giving notice that he intended to go.”

“‘You said, Colonel,’ replied Tom Soppy, ‘that I might go and be d—d.’

“‘That being so,’ and as the colonel spoke he held up the two forefingers for attention, ‘I’ve only to give you permission —to be consistent upon the subject—to come back again and be d—d.’”

"Pleasant and friendly in the extreme!" ejaculated William Bottles, "and the Colonel all over."

"Nothing more was said," added Samuel Wideo, "and thus it was that master and man met after Tom Soppy's visit to me."

"From circumstances over which I have no control," observed William Bottles, "I don't carry a watch. I lent it to a relation of mine some time ago and he stuck to it; but it can't be, I suppose, far off for this artful old nag's arrival."

Upon the dairyman's referring to his own watch, which had not been held in trust since it came into his possession, he announced that "time was up," and as he uttered the words there was a slight knock against the outer door of the apartment as if given through the instrumentality of clenched and muffled nuckles, perhaps gloved.

"Come in," shouted Samuel Wideo, remaining with his back to the fireplace;

for guessing correctly that the expectant visitor had arrived, and not regarding him with any special favour, he resolved to receive him in the spirit of independence.

Slowly—even stealthily—the door was opened, and Jeremiah Early's features became visible in advance of his figure.

“Come in,” again shouted Samuel Wideo.  
“Don’t make it half and half, sir.”

“I’m not intruding, I hope,” said the lawyer, fully developing his form as he closed the door behind him. “I’m not intruding, I hope,” repeated he, with the angles of his mouth drawn back in the shape of a parenthesis.

“Not at all,” replied William Bottles.  
“As the spider said to the fly, pray walk in.”

“Take a chair, sir,” invited the dairyman, “and as there are but two and Billy there’s got one, you can’t make much of a mistake which to choose.”

In occupying the seat, and before he had taken full possession of it, Jeremiah Early—in order to save time, perhaps, which he always declared was the same as money, to which he was extremely partial—commenced to announce the particular object of his visit.

"I'm here," began he, "instructed by Colonel Leferne."

"A gentleman," added William Bottles, "that both of us—Sam as well as myself—would lay down our lives for at any moment."

"He knows that," responded the lawyer, "and, therefore, feels there is no danger in your not strictly obeying an order from him which I'm about to give by his command."

"Only let us know that it comes from the Colonel," rejoined William Bottles, "and it's as good as done. It is *so*."

"The day after to-morrow is the race

for the Derby," returned Jeremiah Early, "and the intentions of both of ye are, it is fair to conjecture, to see the Colonel's horse run for the great stake."

"Remembering the colt was bred on my marsh," rejoined Samuel Wideo, "and born in my stable, I don't think there ought to be any strong objection to my going to Epsom at my own expense, to be one of the hundred thousand witnesses to see Queen Mary's son walk in."

"Walk in," repeated the lawyer, with a sneer imperfectly concealed.

"Ay," replied William Bottles, "walk in; for there's nothing to make him gallop."

"We'll not discuss that point now," added Jeremiah Early. "It will presently be a matter of history."

"As I broke and partly trained the Unknown," observed William Bottles, "and have backed him for the last mag I could beg, borrow, or bag, I'm bound to see him

spin for *my* money, and," added he, bringing his hands together with a loud crack, which sounded of enthusiasm, "to win it."

"Then you'll disobey the order I am charged with from your master?" responded the lawyer.

Both Samuel Wideo looked at the speaker as if struck mute with astonishment.

"Colonel Leferne," continued Jeremiah Early, slowly and methodically, "told me to give you this letter," and, as he spoke, he handed to William Bottles a document sealed with the knightly crest of the Lefernes, "and as the clock strikes twelve on the day of the race—neither before nor after—you are to present it where it is addressed."

William Bottles turned the letter over, looked at it upside down, twisted it round and round by holding it in the middle between a finger and thumb, and then seemed to abandon all hope of solving the mystery.

"No questions are to be asked," resumed the lawyer, "or, if asked, no replies will be given; but I will tell you so far that upon the performance of this duty the fortune which Colonel Leferne is certain to win depends. It hangs upon the slight and single thread of delivering the letter at the time named."

"Such being the case, sir," responded William Bottles, looking at the document as if he expected it to burst into a flame and burn his fingers, "it shall be there as true to the second of time as the sun itself. It shall *so*."

"If I understand correctly," returned Samuel Wideo, "we are not permitted to ask for any explanation?"

"The Colonel," replied Jeremiah Early, "is not the man to allow whys to be put for his wherefores. His habit is to command, and he expects a ready compliance to his orders."

"That's true," added William Bottles.  
"It is *so*."

"Taking, however, into consideration," resumed the lawyer, "the self-denial which must be borne in your not being at Epsom, William Bottles, on the day of the Derby, I'm commissioned by Colonel Leferne to present you now with ten guineas,"—as he spoke he counted the gold deliberately before the glistening eyes of William Bottles and placed it on the table—"and, conditionally that your easy task is performed with punctuality, a balance of ninety more will be handed over by me on the following morning."

"A hundred guineas for delivering a letter!" ejaculated William Bottles, with his eyebrows raised, and his lower jaw dropped.

"Your master is well known for his liberality," responded Jeremiah Early, "and to none more so than to those who serve him. You have but to do, as I've told you,

to secure the money for yourself, and more important results to the Colonel than I could describe, if permitted."

"Don't say another word, sir," returned William Bottles, at a loss for breath from the combined causes of overwhelming delight at his good fortune and astonishment. "Don't say another word, sir," repeated he, in a voice bearing a strong affinity to a sob. "It shall be done. It shall *so*."

Learning from the speaker's earnest tone that his object was effected, Jeremiah Early rose from his seat and announced the intention of taking his departure without further delay.

Samuel Wideo, with a fixed look bent upon the lawyer, still maintained his position with his back to the grate.

"Good night," said Jeremiah, as he stood for a moment on the threshold of the door and turned his head slightly towards the dairyman.

"Good night, sir," echoed William Bottles, as, pausing in the doorway, he watched the lawyer's figure becoming less distinct as it faded in the outer darkness.

Samuel Wideo, however, uttered not a word in reply, but stood in silence with his back to the empty grate warming the broad palms of his hands.

## CHAPTER XXI.

EARLY in the morning, and before the first silver streak of light had tinged the east, a strange, secluded spot had been selected on Epson Downs for a solitary wayfarer to lie down and rest his travel-worn and jaded limbs. Upon a gentle slope, and within a few yards of the imaginary line where the start for the Derby would take place, the solitary wayfarer had stretched himself within the narrow circle of some high and thick bushes of gorse growing luxuriantly in front and behind him, and between which a hare on her form might have fancied herself secure from disturbance. It was one of those few spots which

presented no attraction whatever to the inquisitive, and seemed certain of escaping the search of the most watchful. That solitary wayfarer was travel-worn, and, his senses weighed down and heavy with sleep, seemed disposed to yield to the tender influences of "Nature's soft nurse" before he could light the pipe held between his fingers to the ignited match.

At break of day, and on Epsom Downs, William Bottles was alone, and, for the first time in his chequered existence, in that immediate locality, felt lonely. He cast his eyes around, and saw the camp fires of the followers of the summer race-meetings burning brightly like glow-worm lamps in the darkness. No one knew better than he did the sort of outlaw company that was not far off, and now and again, as loud, angry shouts were raised, William Bottles entertained the strong belief that, for personal safety, he could scarcely be better off than screened

by the furze like a hare on her form.

With his back to the wind, and a pipe burning like a small furnace at white heat, William Bottles stretched his wearied limbs upon the ground ; but scarcely had he placed himself in a comfortable, recumbent position, before the furnace began to wax pale, and soon afterwards he smoked only in a dream. Hour succeeded hour, and still he slept on with the extinguished and fallen pipe resting upon his breast, and, notwithstanding the increased and increasing noise and clamour about him, his slumber remained deep and unbroken. At length, however, there were signs of returning consciousness ; for William Bottles, albeit his eyes were shut, began to rub his nose, and soon afterwards to comb his hair backwards through his fingers by way, perhaps, of collecting his scattered senses. He now yawned as no man ever did without wide, capacious jaws, and then drawing himself up, with the

aid of his elbows, into a sitting position, remained for a few seconds with a steadfast gaze fixed on nothing.

"I shall be all right presently," said he. "I only want a little time to pull myself together." And, as he spoke, he rose with a slight reel upon his feet, and began to make a survey of the surrounding country with the prominent objects of interest within view of his observatory.

With his head just topping the furze in front of him, William Bottles threw a strong, comprehensive look over the broad downs as they lay basking far and wide in the radiant light of a sunny morning late in May.

"Everything looks just as it did," soliloquised he, "a year ago. Time has changed the comers and goers, no doubt, and a good many are under the turf who were above it last Derby; but there's no alteration that I can see in the Downs and the country

round. Beginning at the beginning," continued William Bottles, "which is always a good plan if you don't want to go over some of the ground twice. There's the paddock, out of which the runners for the Derby will come mounted by-an'-by, and looking for all the world like a bed of gorgeous tulips. They will so."

The speaker drew a long breath, and shook his head mysteriously.

"Then," resumed he, "after forming a line along the road, their heads will be turned round, and down that slope they'll come altogether as even as a pack o' cards. There's sure to be a breakaway or two, and delay in the start from some cause or another, which makes thousands o' people feel that a few moments in their blessed lives may be longer than as many hours; but just opposite where I now stand the flag will be dropped, and 'they're off' will be roared from more open throats than one.

Up the hill they'll go at a steady pace, past the bushes"—William Bottles followed the line with a keen eye as he swept the horizon,—“round the bend, down the hill, when the race begins in earnest, and a cracker it is as they turn the corner canoning into the straight. I can see 'em,” continued he. “Bang over the road they come, dust and smoke, a few in front and many behind. ‘What colours are those?’ ‘Purple and orange lead.’ ‘The Unknown wins.’ ‘The Unknown’s beaten for a thousand.’ ‘Purple and orange, with a rush, comes in the last stride upon the post.’ ‘The Colonel wins. Colonel Leferne wins the Derby,’ and his colt wasn’t scratched. I can see it all !”

As William Bottles, in an excited state, finished the imaginary sketch of the race with, to him, its most satisfactory termination, he produced from the breast pocket of his coat, which appeared unusually deep

from the time it occupied in diving his hand into it, the letter begrimed, rubbed, creased, and worn, given him by Jeremiah Early for punctual delivery at twelve o'clock on the day of the Derby.

"I and Sam suspecting a cross," said he, following the subject of his discourse to himself, "with a little gum made a good counterfeit of the Colonel's seal, and then took the liberty of making ourselves masters of the contents of this letter. Had it been on the square, we should have sealed it up again, no one knowing anything about it but our two selves, and I should have nobbled the balance of ninety quid. But when we found out that I was to take the written order for our colt to be scratched within two or three hours of the race, we saw what was meant, and made up our minds to play a little game of our own. To get the last guinea out of the colt was clear enough the milking dodge of Jeremiah Early, and

the Colonel seems to have agreed to stand in with him; but Sam thinks with me that, if he did, he couldn't help himself, as the owner of a race-hoss sometimes is not the puller of the strings. As a gentleman—always a gentleman," continued William Bottles, "the Colonel never could have consented to play the sharp hadn't his throat been under somebody's heel——"

"You but do me justice," interrupted a voice, and, as William Bottles turned round with the startled look of intense surprise, there stood Colonel Leferne leaning slightly forward, with both hands clasped on the top of his cane. "You but do me justice," repeated he.

"I beg your pardon, sir," stammered William Bottles, instinctively touching his forehead with a straightened forefinger, "but I was only thinking aloud."

"Possessing, as I have heard," replied the colonel, "the inestimable quality of

thinking aright. Give me that letter."

It was with the delay scarcely of an instant that the order was not complied with; but Colonel Leferne perceived the hesitation slight as it was."

"Give me that letter," repeated he, with his eyes flashing angrily as he spoke. "I must have, as I thought, a more trustworthy messenger than you."

"I would have done anything else on earth to serve ye, sir," nervously rejoined William Bottles, giving up possession of the letter; "but I could be no party to scratching our colt."

"And yet not very scrupulous on points of honour, if history may be trusted," returned the colonel, with a haughty sneer curling his upper lip.

"I won't say I have been, sir," added William Bottles; "but I couldn't give the order out of my hands to scratch our colt."

"You accepted a bribe, and gave the

promise to do it," harshly retorted Colonel Leferne.

"Not knowing exactly what I was about, sir, at the time," pleaded the accused.

"And basely and criminally broke the seal of the letter with which you had been intrusted."

William Bottles was suddenly seized with a short, hacking cough.

"Placing your own infamous construction upon the contents," continued the colonel, "of which, in common honesty, you should have known nothing."

The irritating cough became more violent.

"Indifferent of the consequences to me," said the colonel, sternly, "and studying your own gratification and interests in the result."

"I'm a d——d scoundrel," responded William Bottles, in a tone which revealed feelings of deep emotion; "but I couldn't scratch the colt."

"Thereby imputing by inference," added the colonel, "that I'm a far greater rascal than yourself."

William Bottles felt the overwhelming force of the argument, and, with the reflection of a moment, thought it expedient to say not a word in reply.

"Is that what you mean?" curtly inquired the colonel.

"Not believing it possible, sir," modestly responded William Bottles, "*I don't.*"

"At the same time knowing that you held my written authority for an act to be done," rejoined the colonel, "against which your own black nature rebels."

"I couldn't scratch the colt," muttered William Bottles, almost inaudibly. "I couldn't scratch the colt," repeated he.

"Why not?" asked the colonel, passionately.

"Because, sir," responded William Bottles, with his right hand pressed on the left

of his breast, “it went against my heart to do it. It did *so*.”

“I entertained no thought that you possessed a heart,” replied the colonel. “The instinct of the animal is sometimes mistaken for sensibility.”

“We common scoundrels, sir,” added William Bottles, serious and respectful in his tone and mien, “have our lengths in whatever branch of business we trade. Some go in for robbing without violence, some with; but *I* couldn’t scratch the colt.”

“So you’ve said before,” replied the colonel. “And as you know that I could, and *can*—”

“But won’t,” interrupted William Bottles, and his hands were raised in the form of an evangelical petition as he spoke. “You won’t do that, sir, will ye, hard up as you may be?”

“Would you have him, then, run to win,

and the stake my ruin, certain and inevitable ruin?"

"It's a hard word, sir," replied William Bottles. "Ruin is a hard word in the mouth of a gentleman."

"Still believing what I have said," rejoined the colonel, "you would, reckless of the consequences to me, let him start and win?"

"If left to me, sir," returned William Bottles, "he should go if I were to die as he passed the post, winner or loser. I couldn't scratch the colt."

"So I learned, with a little seasonable pressure, from Wideo," added the colonel, "and, being furnished by him with the exact point of your whereabouts, will account for my finding you here. I now think that I can trust ye."

The warm blood began to mantle through the cheeks of William Bottles as this remark was made in the tint of a maiden's blush.

"I now think that I can trust ye," repeated Colonel Leferne, musingly.

"In anything but scratching the colt," rejoined William Bottles. "I could crib the bit o' sugar from a canary bird's cage, but would have no hand in making the Unknown a safe-un."

With his eyes fixed upon the greensward, and a brow knitted in deep thought, Colonel Leferne began to tear the letter, which hitherto he had held motionless in his hand, into small fragments, and let them fall fluttering to the ground.

"It's early yet," remarked he, as if communing with himself, "and there is plenty of time for mischief to be done between now and sunset."

"Many a man will be a mouse," philosophically rejoined William Bottles, "and many a mouse a man! They will *so*."

"The lifelong changes in the social scale," continued the colonel, as if impressed with

the remark, “being woven by fate within the limits of two minutes and forty-eight seconds.”

The small fragments of the letter still continued to fall fluttering to the ground, and the colonel stood tearing them asunder in a manner which seemed to give vent to feelings of a somewhat intense description.

“Backers and bookmakers are put out of their misery, sir,” returned William Bottles, “in about that time for the Derby, and I’ve seen a few coves look as if they had lived forty years between the start and the finish. I have *so*.”

“More lives are run for than we know of, perhaps,” added the colonel; “and, after all, in the long run, the losers may be the gainers, for aught we can tell, so little can we see beyond the present.”

“I never yet saw a man look pleased with the boot on the wrong leg, sir,” observed William Bottles.

"Probably not," responded the colonel, musingly. "I can understand, without much effort," continued he, "that uneven pressure is painful and inconvenient."

The last remnant of the letter had now dropped from the colonel's fingers, and he stood thoughtfully leaning forward, with his hands crossed on the top of his cane.

"Be here," said he, after a short pause, and bending a stern look upon William Bottles, "as the clock strikes twelve. I may want to see you then—neither sooner nor later." And, thus speaking, he turned and slowly quitted the spot, leaving William Bottles gazing in silence at his retreating form.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE bell was clanging harshly for the course to be cleared, and "the ring" had arrived at the climax of excitement, when Jeremiah Early might have been seen within the circle of speculators, momentarily questioned by men in whispers, with deeply-lined and bloodless features, and looks betraying anxiety hidden but not concealed.

"It's long past the time," mysteriously remarked a member of the ring, "and I can't hear of his being scratched."

The lawyer drew from a pocket, with great deliberation, a watch, and, glancing at the hour, sneered in silence, and replaced it without a syllable falling from his lips.

"The Demon's weighed out," observed the communicative member of the ring, in a manner which denoted anything but mental composure, "and is now going to mount."

"Is he?" curtly replied Jeremiah Early.  
"What then?"

"He'll start," was the rejoinder, "if not proved by authority that the Unknown is scratched."

"And what then?" inquired the lawyer, with an inward chuckle of mental satisfaction.

"If he wins," rejoined the member of the ring, with a look of serious import, "and, from any accident, the pen has not been put through the name of the Unknown, the bets will go with the stakes. That's all!"

That's all?

The words appeared to strike Jeremiah Early in a sensible spot, for he gasped as if at a sudden loss for breath, and stared at

his informant with his lower jaw dropped and protruding eyeballs.

That's all ?

He was legally responsible for thousands, for had not he commissioned others to lay for him ?

That's all ?

What if his messenger failed ? Were the savings of a life, no matter how saved or made, to be lost in two minutes and forty-eight seconds ? The lawyer's brain reeled, and he staggered backwards as if from a blow. That which had been most distant from his thoughts now presented itself in a form of hideous reality. The possibility of losing never came across his shallow brain until told that "the bets would go with the stakes." So, then, be the intention of the owner or nominator of a horse what it might, so long as the strict conditions of the race were fulfilled, he might be returned a winner against the absolute order that he

was not even to be allowed to start.

"Is this true?" said he, as if speaking in a dream.

"You'll find it to be so," replied the member of "the ring," "if he's not scratch-ed and wins."

"Had I known this," rejoined Jeremiah Early, faintly, "no risk should have been run. I would have taken the letter myself; but I wished to see——"

"The last shilling got out of the horse," added the member of "the ring," with a broad grin. "Isn't that what you mean?"

"The scoundrel Bottles cannot have played false with me!" ejaculated the lawyer, without noticing the observation. "I agreed to pay him well for his work."

"But supposing he was better paid for not doing it," suggested the member of "the ring."

"I begin to fear the villain has been!" bitterly exclaimed Jeremiah Early. "It

should be known by now," continued he, again referring with a feverish, anxious look at his watch; "it should be known by now that the Unknown is not to start."

"There go the numbers up," remarked the member of "the ring." "We shall soon see if number three is among them."

As he spoke some long black boards were hoisted with white numbers painted on them, corresponding with those on the official cards which professed to give "a correct list of the names, weights, and colours of the riders."

"Number three," read the member of "the ring," and referring to his card. "The Unknown, bay colt, sire unknown, dam Queen Mary, by Gauntlet, by Bright Steel, by Helmet Plume, and, as I said, the Demon rides."

"There's foul play here," responded Jeremiah Early, in a voice scarcely articu-

late. "I begin to suspect that I'm robbed."

"He's anything but the dead-'un your commissioners have been laying against," returned the member of "the ring," "and, if I see the Demon up, I'll take my own money back, and cover every penny of my loss."

"Cover mine too," whined the lawyer. "I feel that I'm about to be let in—I do indeed."

"Every man for himself at a moment like this," added the member of "the ring." "Get out, if you can—I will," and, thus speaking, he hurried away, leaving Jeremiah Early alone in the crowd with a brain bewildered at what he both saw and heard.

A marvellously sudden change was now perceptible in the odds offered against the Unknown. Instead of being more than willing to lay fabulous sums against Queen Mary's son, the crafty bookmakers appeared seized with suspicion that "something was

wrong," and as hasty words and looks were exchanged, they shook their heads, and sullenly announced "they were full against him." No one would venture to lay against the chance of the Unknown, for he was now seen in the paddock saddled for the start, and that the Leferne colours, the erst well-known purple jacket and orange cap, were worn by the Demon, who had the mount.

Muttered oaths were heard from various and opposite quarters of "the ring," and nothing could be more evident than "something was wrong."

Jeremiah Early, besieged with a group of fiery members of "the ring," each demanding to be informed "what was meant," replied that "he didn't know," and no form of answer, either general or particular, could be nearer the truth. He wished that he knew, and said so; but no apparent satisfaction was given to the excited questioners by

the expression of his wish. Rough charges were made of a strong belief that the lawyer had been both "backing and laying, and that 'the ring,' through him, had been robbed to a man."

"Where's all the money to come from," cried one, "if this horse wins?"

The lawyer shuddered at the thought that much of the loss would have to be produced from his own pocket.

The discussion, fierce and angry as it was, although the tone was subdued so as to be heard only by those close by, came to a sudden termination by the appearance of the mounted horses walking in line in front of "the ring." Eyes with gifted and acquired powers of criticism examined the candidates for the highest honour of the Turf as they walked along with dainty tread, "the observed of all observers," but the majority of eyes which gazed upon them knew nothing more of their qualifications

beyond the bright and showy colours in which they were ridden.

Twenty-two horses paraded between the double lines of admiring spectators ; but there was still another to complete the number given on the telegraph-board, and that was number three.

The sanguine hope rose like a bright and sparkling bubble in the despairing breast of Jeremiah Early that he had been inflicting upon William Bottles a most unmerited injury, and that, after all, the condemnation passed upon him was undeserved. Oh, that such hopes, unlike bubbles, were never doomed to burst ! Such, at least, were the human sentiments of Jeremiah Early as he both saw and heard the confirmation of his worst human fears.

Alone, and with a wide distance separating him from the close line of horses which had gone before, the Unknown came with stately tread and head aloft, while every

now and then he lashed his flanks with his silky, square-cut tail, as if in defiance of the coming struggle. Amidst both loud and suppressed admiration, the favourite strode along as if conscious of his own symmetrical beauty, with his bright coat shining like satin in the sun, and looking from head to heel the perfection of a race-horse.

Carried with that graceful ease and confidence which pertain alone to the perfect master of his art, the purple jacket and orange cap never looked, perhaps, to greater advantage than at the present moment. "The Demon," to the joy of many and mental distress of few, had, as was anticipated, the mount on Queen Mary's son, and this was enough to be known, that, if honest and skilful riding could secure success, the race would be won.

"The dam all over except in colour, Jane," observed a spectator sitting in a large, high-wheeled cart, between the shafts

of which stood harnessed a small, hog-maned pony with a short-cut and somewhat ragged tail. "The dam all over, Jane," repeated the spectator, "except in colour."

"That saint-like creetur who gave me this precious tract just now as we were coming on the course," replied the spectator's companion in the cart, "called, I see, 'A race to the Devil,' has turned my mind heavenwards, Ebenezer. I'm a-thinking," continued she, "of the Apostles."

"Oh!" sharply exclaimed the Brentford blacksmith, for the occupants of the cart were he and his wife, "leave the 'Postles alone, Jane Jolly, and let's talk of dams. There's a time and place for all things," continued he, in a persuasive tone, "and this is the place for dams."

Jane Jolly sighed, arranged her blazing-coloured shawl over her ponderous shoulders, shook her head, and was silent.

"When I plated that colt's dam —"

"I wish you'd drop your parts of speech," interrupted Jane Jolly, in a reproving manner. "They quite grate on my feelin's, Ebenezer. They do, indeed."

"I was going to say," continued he, in a manner expressive of coaxing, "that you were about as nice shaped a filly, Jane, as a man could wish to put his arms round."

As a matter of plain, unvarnished record, unmixed with the poetry of action, Mrs. Jolly turned her head aside with becoming modesty, and gave a straight thrust at the ribs of the Brentford blacksmith which brought forth an emphatic "Ho!"

"None o' your tenderness, Ebenezer," rejoined Jane, with downcast eyes, "or I may have recourse to violence."

Feeling at least what the effect of ordinary force was, the Brentford blacksmith seemed to arrive at a conclusion that "tenderness" had better be postponed, and his general deportment became forthwith as hard as iron.

"Get on, Bob," said he, drawing a stiff ash stick from between his knees and administering a cut straight down the spine of the hog-maned pony. "Get on, Bob," repeated he.

But Bob had learned from daily experience between the shafts of the large, high-wheeled cart that whether he went on or stood still made little difference in the amount of punishment he received on the average, that he had to study his inclination solely upon the subject, and, preferring ease to exertion, he generally stood still when required to move on, the verdict being in his own mind, "and quite right, too."

"I don't think Bob'll move on just yet," blandly remarked Jane Jolly, raising her eyes from the tract which had been presented to her by "the saint-like creetur."

"I see he won't," replied the blacksmith, again drawing the stick from Bob's shoulder in a line to his quarter. "I see he won't,"

repeated he; "but he shall have his licking for all that."

And Bob took his licking like a philosopher, never moving a peg.

"Here they come," shouted Ebenezer, as the horses swept towards them in their preliminary canter. "How it stirs up my young blood! Doesn't it yourn?"

Jane Jolly gave no reply; but, coming from the north, her pulses beat quickly and her cheeks flushed crimson as the field streamed by, number three being last and far behind.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THOUSANDS of eyes strained and concentrated to one point; thousands of hearts beating with hope, fear, and dread, many with pain, and few with pleasure; tens of thousands of pounds sterling depending upon the result, all and everything in connection with the Derby being enumerated in thousands and tens of thousands.

Twenty-three horses were at the post ready for the start, but, although ready, there was some difficulty in effecting it, and an interval elapsed of long, suffering, agonizing suspense before the bright red flag was dropped and a roar of voices proclaimed they were "off."

"As good a start as ever was seen," remarked William Bottles, behind his screen of gorse. "As even as a pack of cards," continued he, watching, with a riveted gaze, the position and movement of the Unknown, as, sweeping up the hill in the ruck of horses, his colours were carried forward, but not in front.

"He's just where he ought to be at the beginning," observed William Bottles. "'The Demon' knows what the race means—the best turn o' speed from Tattenham Corner to the post. That's what winning the Derby means."

The changes were not many in the places held by the horses at the start as they gained the top of the hill, but immediately afterwards the purple jacket and orange cap were seen more forward still; but not in front.

"The Demon's taking a feeler," remarked William Bottles, with blinkless, blood-shot eyes, as he watched the race.

Past the well-known bushes which momentarily hid them from his sight, and then the work began to tell upon those manifestly unequal to the task of making the pace.

"They begin to tail off now," remarked William Bottles, exultingly ; "but our colours don't drop back, and won't."

Forward kept the purple jacket and orange cap ; but not in front.

Now for the corner. Down the hill and round the bend they came like winged arrows from a bow. With a force which brought them nearly to the ground two of the leaders cannoned against each other, and for a moment impeded the line of the Unknown. His rider, however, steadied him with a skilful, judicious pull, and, recovering his knocked out stride, he was over the road among the forward ; but not in front.

First one and then another looked to have the best of the race as they approached the distance, challenge after challenge being given by the leaders.

A yellow jacket and black cap came with a rush to the van.

“Merry wins,” was shouted from a thousand throats. “Merry wins!”

Then a bright cherry colour threatened danger to the yellow as they raced side by side.

“Sir Joseph wins,” was now the cry.  
“Sir Joseph wins!”

“The Baron,” roared countless partisans, as a dark blue jacket and yellow cap were made conspicuous in the front rank. “The Baron wins!”

The moments were now few for the termination of the contest.

Jeremiah Early stood in the ring bewildered at what he heard, and, as for seeing, everything seemed to flicker and dance before his eyes as if looking through air heated to intensity.

In a spot chosen by himself, far removed from the excited crowd, a figure might have

been seen alone resting with his hands crossed on the top of his cane, and watching the race with compressed lips and flashing gaze.

"My orders were for him to come now," said he, in a tone only heard by himself, for it was what might strictly be called inward. "I told him," continued he, "to break their hearts at the distance."

Just as the thought was expressed, the purple jacket and orange cap came more forward, and the next instant were in front. "And it will be done!" muttered the colonel, with bated breath "Now he'll break their hearts!"

The Demon rode side by side with a horse whose heart, perhaps, was tougher than the rest, for, unlike the remainder of the field, he was not to be shaken off, and the two, as they stretched towards the winning post, looked as if linked together.

Frantic shouts arose from every point.

“The Unknown wins.” “The Unknown’s beaten.”

Three strides more, and the last given in favour of Queen Mary’s son.

“Won by a short head.”

Such was the fiat of the judge which awarded the Derby to the Unknown, and realized the prophecy of the parrot at the “Greyhound.”

“The ambitious object of my life attained at last,” murmured Colonel Leferne, as he lifted his hat, and wiped his hot and feverish brow with a handkerchief. “But at what cost?” continued he. “Well, no matter! If I have made a loss by winning, still the race is won.”

“It’s all r—r—right, sir,” stammered William Bottles, as with breathless haste he ran at the top of his speed to where the colonel was standing. “Number three’s up and he’s weighed in. What a day for us!”

"It's one that is likely to be remembered," responded Colonel Leferne.

"Those that laid against our hoss thinking he was sure to be scratched," returned William Bottles, with a laugh which might have been heard a considerable distance with the wind, "are not likely to forget it soon. They've caught what may be called a facer, sir."

"Great rogues possess little wit," added the colonel, "and in trying to net others often get into the trammels themselves. You backed the horse with the hundred I gave you?"

"With as good a man as any in the 'ring,' sir," exultingly replied William Bottles, "at the liberal starting price of five to one."

"Divide the amount equally between Wideo and yourself," rejoined the colonel. "That must satisfy you," continued he, "for I have no more to give."

"But you have won a fortune for yourself, sir?" said William Bottles, interrogatively.

"When the stakes are apportioned in accordance with my promises," responded the colonel, raising the two fingers of his right hand for his hearer to observe marked attention, "I shall have left for myself the honour of having won the Derby with a colt—sire unknown."

William Bottles was about to return an answer, and of a generous kind; but before a word could be spoken Colonel Leferne had quitted the spot, and he instinctively knew that to follow him would be an offence.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

14







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